

JANUARY 1952

COMMENTARY

Why the Kremlin Extorts Confessions

MELVIN J. LASKY

Jewish Work-Camp in Indianapolis

IRWIN STARK

Bread and Democracy in Greece

MAURICE J. GOLDBLOOM

Disraeli: The Chosen of History

PHILIP RIEFF

A Warsaw Fighter in Israel

ZELDA POPKIN

The Day the FBI Came to Our House

HARRY GERSH

Death of a Genius

HANS MEYERHOFF

Next of Kin—A Story

EDGAR ROSENBERG

From the American Scene—

Jewish Editor: Frontier Style

BEN LAPPIN

Cedars of Lebanon—

All Things Are Possible

LEV SHESTOV

On the Horizon—

Exodus: Adaptation by Sholem Asch

LESLIE A. FIEDLER

The Study of Man—

New Light on the Races of Man

DON J. HAGER

BOOKS IN REVIEW

David Daiches

George Z. Goldberg

William Poster

Paul Kecskemeti

Isa Kapp

H. R. Trevor-Roper

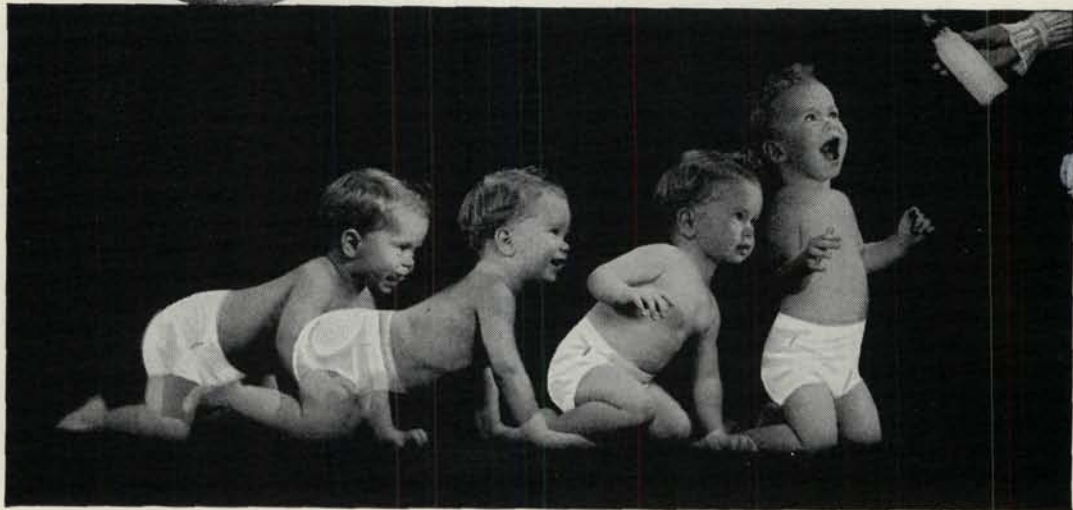
PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

50c



Baby, have you
got that TIED feeling?



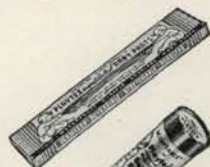
Your baby is never bound, bothered or bewildered in

Playtex Baby Panties

—comfortable waterproof panties that don't grip, mark or cut circulation
...always keep your baby "socially acceptable"*

Cuddly baby is lovely to look at—and delightful to hold—in Playtex Baby Panties! The exclusive Playtex features always keep precious baby neater and sweeter...cool, clean, *comfortable*. They don't bind...don't cut circulation—ever! Only Playtex Baby Panties, made of smooth liquid latex, fit so gently and tenderly at leg openings and waist. They stretch *all over*, for all-over comfort! Extra durable and accurately sized to baby's weight, they keep their shape and softness until baby outgrows them. Keep your little darling in Playtex Baby Panties and you'll never, *never* buy any other brand.

At your favorite department store and wherever baby needs are sold.



PLAYTEX BABY PANTS
Pink, white, blue.
In silvery gift
packages **79¢**



**PLAYTEX TRANSPARENT
BABY PANTS**—Extra
light, extra cool.
In silvery gift tubes **89¢**



**PLAYTEX SNAP-ON
BABY PANTS**—Only
snap-ons that stretch *all*
over. In silvery
gift boxes **\$1.19**

More babies wear **Playtex** than any other baby pants!

*TRADE MARK

International Latex Corporation, PLAYTEX PARK, Dover Del. • Playtex Ltd., Montreal, Canada

©1951

COMMENTARY

A Statement of Aims

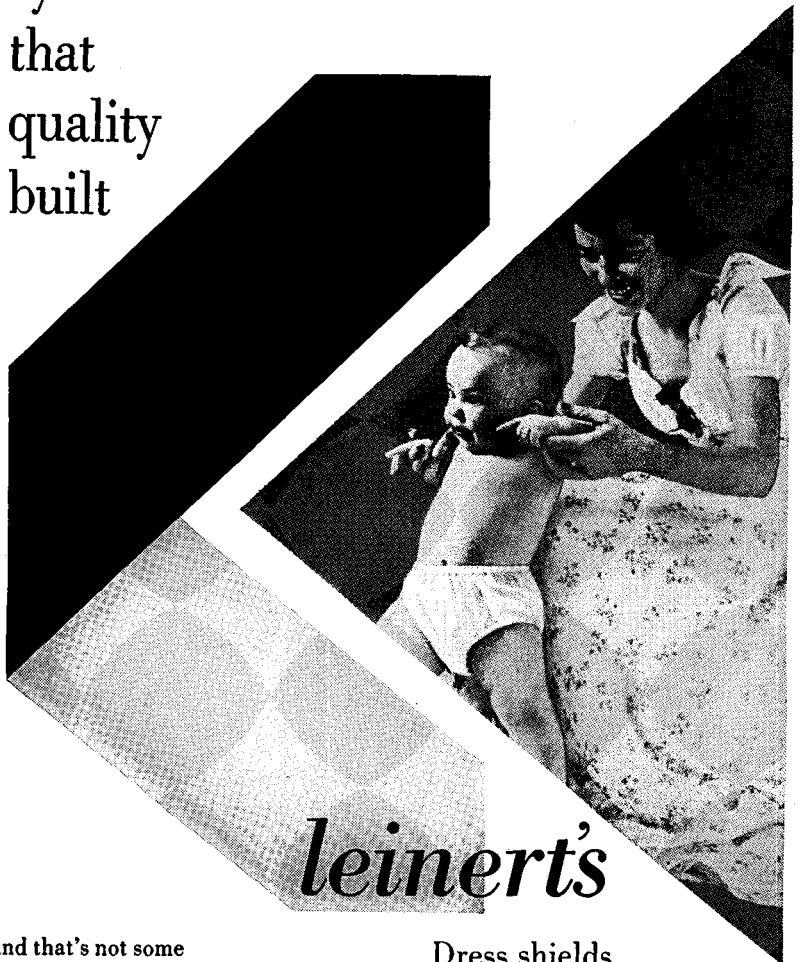
In sponsoring COMMENTARY, the American Jewish Committee aims to meet the need for a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues. Its pages will be hospitable to diverse points of view and belief, and it hopes to encourage original creative endeavor in the various fields of culture.

The opinions and views expressed by COMMENTARY's contributors and editors are their own, and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position. Its sponsorship of COMMENTARY is in line with its general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights, and to promote Jewish cultural interest and creative achievement in America.

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

JACOB BLAUSTEIN, *President*

the
symbol
that
quality
built



Kleinert's

K stands for quality . . . and that's not some kind of new-fangled, simplified spelling. Kleinert's has always meant quality . . . just ask the mothers and grandmothers of today's customers.

Yes, a lot of our customers seem to think that Kleinert's has a genius for quality. And behind this genius stands that well-known capacity for taking pains. Scrupulous care for detail is a part of every job . . . whether it involves ultra-modern machines, or patient hand operations.

We think this attention to detail is responsible for a big share of Kleinert's reputation for quality. We're pretty proud of it!

** Kleinert's*

485 Fifth Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

Dress shields
Garter belts and girdles
Sanitary lingerie
Baby pants
Crib sheets
Swim caps
Shower curtains
Adjustable hair nets
Beach bags
Nursery items

*®

COMMENTARY

JANUARY 1952

VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1

Why the Kremlin Extorts Confessions	Melvin J. Lasky	1
Jewish Work-Camp in Indianapolis	Irwin Stark	7
Bread and Democracy in Greece	Maurice J. Goldbloom	14
Disraeli: The Chosen of History	Philip Rieff	22
A Warsaw Fighter in Israel	Zelda Popkin	34
The Illusion <i>A Poem</i>	David Ignatow	37
The Day the FBI Came to Our House	Harry Gersh	38
Death of a Genius	Hans Meyerhoff	44
Next of Kin <i>A Story</i>	Edgar Rosenberg	52
From the American Scene		
Jewish Editor: Frontier Style	Ben Lappin	62
The Sabbath Bride <i>A Poem</i>	Saul Touster	67
Cedars of Lebanon		
All Things Are Possible	Lev Shestov	68
On the Horizon		
Exodus: Adaptation by Sholem Asch	Leslie A. Fiedler	72
The Study of Man		
New Light on the Races of Man	Don J. Hager	76
Letters from Readers		83
Books in Review		
A Treasury of Jewish Humor, edited by Nathan Ausubel	David Daiches	87
Cairo to Damascus, by John Roy Carlson, and Eternal Stranger, by Lawrence Resner	George Z. Goldberg	89
The Catcher in the Rye, by J. D. Salinger	William Poster	90
Georges Sorel, Prophet Without Honor, by Richard Humphrey	Paul Kecskemeti	92
Bride of the Sabbath, by Samuel Ornitz	Isa Kapp	94
The Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker	H. R. Trevor-Roper	97

Associate Editors
NATHAN GLAZER
CLEMENT GREENBERG
ROBERT WARSHOW

Editor
ELLIOT E. COHEN

Business Manager
FRANCES GREEN

Managing Editor
IRVING KRISTOL

Assistant Editor
SHERRY ABEL

Advertising: MARY LEA SHIMAN

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

ALAN M. STROOCK, *Chairman*

CHARLES D. BREITEL, MAX ENGLER, MAURICE GLINERT, RALPH K. GUINZBURG,
SYDNEY M. KAYE, ANNE W. LANGMAN, HILDA LEE, LOUIS M. RABINOWITZ,
MARIE L. ROTHSCHILD, RALPH E. SAMUEL, DAVID SHER, JACK D. TARCHER,
MILTON WEILL, IRA M. YOUNKER

COMMENTARY, incorporating *Contemporary Jewish Record*: Published monthly by the American Jewish Committee. 50c a copy; \$5.00 a year; 2 years \$8.00; 3 years, \$10.00. Canadian and Foreign \$1.00 a year additional. Offices, 34 West 33rd Street, New York 1. Re-entered as second class matter October 30, 1945 at the post office in New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1951, by the American Jewish Committee. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved by the publisher in the United States, Great Britain, Mexico, and all countries participating in the International Copyright Convention and the Pan-American Copyright Convention. Indexed in International Index to Periodicals, Magazine Subject Index, and Public Affairs Information Service.

IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES OF COMMENTARY

American Jews in Israel

Hal Lehrman

In recent months, there has been some cooling of the warm sentiments that through war and crisis bound together Israeli and American Jews. A special interest attaches, therefore, to Hal Lehrman's report on the shifting currents of Israeli feeling towards the American Jewish community and towards American Jews as individuals, both those who have come in response to the call for immigrants and those who for other reasons find themselves living and working in the new state.

Culture Under Industrialism

Clement Greenberg

T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* raised many very important questions but illuminated few. Clement Greenberg attempts a closer look at some of them, and particularly at the present state and prospects of our American culture.

British Socialism: The Bankruptcy of Success

Irwin Ross

In its six years of office, the British Labor party accomplished the major part of its original program for increased social welfare, but it also found by hard experience that there still remained a host of problems which traditional socialist theory had either ignored or misconceived. Relieved of the burdens of government, Labor has begun to think about these problems; Mr. Ross reports the trend of this thinking.

The Abstemious Jew

Nathan Glazer

In Israel, we are told, whiskey is about the cheapest commodity to be found—even so, the bottles gather dust on the shelves. And in the United States, the Jewish alcoholic is still a rarity. A review of the facts and theories on Jewish resistance to hard liquor.

The Passing of the Batlan

Theodor H. Gaster

The literal meaning of the Hebrew-Yiddish word *batlan* is "idler," and perhaps that is all the future will know of it. But there was a time, still in living memory, when the *batlan* was nothing less than an institution—the Jew of insatiable curiosity and infinite quasi-erudition, the lover of rhetoric and polemic, the grasshopper among the honest ants of learning. Theodor Gaster reminisces on some *batlanim* he has known and laments the decay of this honorable calling.

The "Silent Generation" Begins to Talk

Will Herberg

Recently, *Time* magazine published a survey of American youth under the heading "The Silent Generation." The phrase was intended to point up a certain lackluster quality among youth today, an apathy toward values, an absence of moral earnestness. But, Will Herberg reports, this situation is already being significantly changed; especially among college students is there a new seriousness coming to the fore.

COMMENTARY

WHY THE KREMLIN EXTORTS CONFESSIONS

The Most Jealous God, the Cruellest Inquisition

MELVIN J. LASKY

IN THE light of all that was to happen during the great purge of 1936-1938, it is interesting to note that Stalin himself had earlier said: "A policy of chopping off heads is fraught with great dangers. . . . The method of chopping off and bloodletting—and blood is being called for—is dangerous and infectious. You chop off one head today, another tomorrow, another the day after—what in the end will be left of the party?"

Could this conceivably have been an ominous prophecy, to be understood only in terms of Stalin's familiar stylistic habit of posing himself rhetorical questions? He cer-

tainly proceeded to answer it: blood did flow, heads were chopped, and nothing was left of the party—except himself. Is that what he intended, did he mean it that way? So precious little is really known about the man's motives and psychology. We can only speculate in the shadow of the remark which Souvarine has reported Stalin to have uttered, on a summer night in 1923, to Dzerzhinsky and Kamenev: "To choose one's victim, to prepare one's plans minutely, to slake an implacable vengeance, and then to go to bed. . . . There is nothing sweeter in the world."

To do a study of *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession*, as Messrs. Beck and Godin have done in an important book recently published by Viking Press, and to omit "the pock-marked one," sleeping securely in the Kremlin, is surely to do *Hamlet* without the Prince. They had, of course, no alternative. The authors, a "heretical" Soviet historian and a "suspect" German scientist, sat in the Lubianka, tapping on their cell walls in the old Russian fashion, gathering information from hundreds of "saboteurs," "spies," "wreckers." They admit their ignorance of what went on in the highest party circles, of decisive motivations and psychology. Nevertheless, despite this ignorance, it remains true that "no one knows what kind of government it is," as Tolstoy once wrote, "until he has been in its prisons." Echoing

MUCH has been written about that bizarre Soviet institution—the "showcase" trial, in which people confess to crimes they did not do, could not have done. Some of the literature on the subject is sensational or romantic nonsense; yet, subtracting this, there still remains a considerable body of authentic information and plausible analysis on "Why do they confess?"—in any particular case, we now know of many methods that could have achieved the observable result. Yet that mystery dissolved, a tantalizing riddle remains, as MELVIN J. LASKY points out. Why does the Communist regime insist upon confessions that no one believes? When the last act has been written in advance, why bother to fabricate a tortuous drama? Mr. Lasky is the editor of *Der Monat*, a German-language monthly sponsored by the State Department which is widely regarded as one of the best periodicals now published in Europe.

this, the authors note that “without long residence in the NKVD cells it is impossible to find out what the Soviet people really feel and think,” and have gone on to write the most thoughtful and stimulating book that has yet appeared on Stalin’s terror.

This is not another personal story of torture and escape, but at long last a serious effort on the part of the victims to grasp the historic essence of what was happening to them. If it is not exactly history (who can do research in the Kremlin archives?) it is first-rate journalism and intelligent social analysis. After all, perhaps it is possible to find out the *meaning* of political events and processes without quite knowing, in any detailed or documented way, *why* they happened.

THAT Soviet Russia was undergoing some kind of deep transformation during the years of the Great Purge would seem to be undeniable. An estimated 5 to 10 per cent of the population fell into the hands of the secret police. An entire generation of leaders—in the Bolshevik party, in the army, in the universities and laboratories, in the factories and trade unions, in the secret police itself—was physically wiped out. Everyday life became a thing of terror. Children denounced their parents, famous men rewrote their lives, workmen were found to have attempted—according to their own confessions—to blow up Dnieper bridges with a gram of arsenic, mad scientists were found to have labored over test tubes to induce artificial volcanoes; a Jewish engineer was found to be designing a new institute in the form of what only could be—a half-swastika!

Against the backdrop of this collectivized dance of death, any single one of the two dozen explanatory theories which Beck and Godin have ingeniously assembled appears thin and absurd. An explanation from astrology seems no less inadequate than an explanation from economics, anthropology, or geopolitics. Was this a method of recruiting a cheap supply of labor power—by making available skilled engineers as common laborers? Was it simply an idiotic farce, an automatic working out of the denunciation

system, with the victims accumulating in geometric progression? Was it a violent cathartic for maintaining the open “circulation of the elite”—doesn’t Frazer tell us about the ancient Roman custom of priestly succession by slaying predecessors? Is “Asia,” with its terrible Ivanism, somehow a more illuminating suggestion—as if Caucasian Georgia were not an area with a tradition of gentleness and rich civilization?

Historical analogy and sweeping sociological generalization remain, and to them Beck and Godin finally turn. The analogy is in terms of “the Bonapartist completion of Stalin’s personal power” in a court atmosphere choked with “Caesarean persecution mania”: “When a fantastic amount of power had been concentrated in the hands of one person, such as the Roman Emperors, Ivan the Terrible, or Philip II of Spain, the autocrat had often developed acute symptoms of pathological persecution mania, causing him to mistrust even his closest supporters.” Sociologically, the great Russian purges represent a phenomenon familiar enough to students of society: a neo-absolutist consolidation of centralized power. *The lower ranks of the party and apparatus were supported against the senior privileged groups who had now become almost a mandarin caste. The result: “a bureaucratically controlled Oriental despotism, modified by the adoption of modern methods of production, technical aids, and methods of guiding the masses.”*

This way of looking at the matter is probably the best we can manage at the present time. It is certainly cogent, making use as it does of familiar categories. Yet perhaps it seems cogent only because the categories *are* familiar. That is the trouble with our theoretical speculations on the foundations of totalitarianism. One is never sure whether an explanation is true because it actually matches the way things really happened or merely because it fits into current and hence persuasive sociological formulas.

IT is certain, however, that our view of the historic course of this “second Soviet Revolution” has for too long been blurred by an

incredulous emphasis on the element of mystery in the melodramatic and preposterous confessions of Bukharin, Radek, and the other broken spirits of the Bolshevik old guard. World opinion could not comprehend that in Russia even confessions were no longer the private property of a man's conscience but articles owned and rationed by the state. Discussions of "Why did they confess?" missed the really baffling point: why did the NKVD bother with confessions at all?

There were thousands and thousands of them. "A rule to which there were practically no exceptions," write Beck and Godin, "was that no interrogation could be concluded except with a confession." The techniques of extracting confessions are no longer secret. In some cases there were the time-honored methods of the third degree—beatings, torture, spotlights. For the most part, protracted questioning, accompanied by sleeplessness and radical discomfort, sufficed.* But the most spectacular results were achieved by what in the NKVD terminology were known as "cultural methods." Here non-violent persuasion managed to induce voluntary admissions of guilt, sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of hope, more characteristically out of a dialectical devotion to the "party line" that lay in a residual fanaticism, an abject cynicism, and an obsessive sense of guilt.

In his book *Men and Politics* (1941), Louis Fischer reminisces of those days in Moscow: "The Moscow Trials and confessions were merely the sensational, highly silhouetted shape of an everyday Soviet phenomenon. . . . Millions of Soviet citizens live lies every day to save their lives and their jobs. They make false confessions day in and day out. They write lies, speak lies. They lie to one another and know it. They lie to themselves and get accustomed to it. They lose their illusions and succumb to the sole cynical goal of self-preservation until a better day. The assassination of character and the annihilation of personality is the dictatorship's chief weapon. . . ." And one "loyal

Soviet scholar," according to Beck and Godin, explained in his cell: "I was prepared for arrest. Why? Because, like all other Soviet citizens, I carried about with me a consciousness of guilt, an inexplicable sense of sin, a vague and indefinable feeling of having transgressed, combined with an ineradicable expectation of inevitable punishment."

The fiction of Arthur Koestler and Victor Serge has effectively explored the logic of submission to Soviet authority, as a result of which legends, lies, fables, the tallest of tales became commonplaces of the confessional. The creative imagination itself was enlisted in the tortuous process—the development is actually reported of "real artists and specialists in this line who were often moved from cell to cell by the magistrate for the purpose of helping with confessions." The regime even reserved the right to return unsolicited contributions, and there was established a standard of "acceptable confessions." Beck and Godin observe soberly that "great powers of persuasion on the part of the accused were often necessary to convince the examining magistrate of the seriousness and importance of a fictitious espionage legend and to get him to accept it."

The mystery, then, is not why the victims confessed—of this we have a clear notion; the real mystery that remains is why they were required to confess. Why did Stalin need their confessions?

It is true that in Russian law generally there is an emphasis on the ritual act of confession; but this constitutes an act of repentance "prerequisite to absolving the person," and serves to mitigate guilt rather than to compound it. Nor did the Soviet regime need the confessions, as Beck and Godin imagine, for propaganda purposes—for either "foreign consumption" or the satisfaction of the people's "ideological sense of justice." The outside world, able to check whether certain hotels existed in Copenhagen (the Bristol, alleged meeting place of the Moscow conspirators, had long ago been destroyed by fire) or whether planes arrived on certain dates in Oslo (Trotsky was supposed to have received

* An excellent account of how this works is to be found in Alexander Weissberg's *The Accused*, just published by Simon and Schuster.

mysterious air visitors on wintry days when not a Norwegian field was open), soon saw through the shabby fabric of the manufactured evidence; while the Soviet citizen, with a close friend or relative in some prison, could hardly himself be expected to take the matter as credible.

And if we concede the police's need legally to justify its method of operation to Stalin (who, in 1937, had publicly warned against "a mass witch-hunt"), there is still Hitler's example of the legalization of crimes by retrospective and retroactive legislation, and the rendering illegal of its victims' acts by *ex post facto* laws. Was anything more complex than this needed to fulfill that hunger for "consistency" which Hannah Arendt stresses as a major characteristic of the totalitarian world? How indeed was it that confessions, "voluntarily" given, nothing more, nothing less, were required and felt to be conclusive as well as indispensable?

Grappling with this most fascinating psychological problem in contemporary world politics, the authors of *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession* scour history for a revealing parallel. There is, obviously, the Inquisition, and we are referred to the 15th-century handbook *Malleus Maleficarum*, which contains precise instructions for interrogation and the extortion of confessions. But this much has to be noted: the Inquisition's trials occurred in the framework of the traditional Church where "confession" was an institution and an established mode of individual behavior on the part of the believer; the aim of the confession, even when extorted, was also obvious—it saved the soul of the sinner from eternal damnation. In Stalin's Russia, no one would think of regarding "confession" as something having a supernatural sanction and an other-worldly function. It is something natural, of this world—yet without any apparent human reason. Those who confess will go down in Soviet history as treacherous beasts, which is what they might have expected had they never confessed at all.

The "best historical analogy," it is suggested by Beck and Godin, is the expropriation

and persecution of the Knights Templars in 14th-century France. But here once again we are dealing with phenomena as they occur in an ecclesiastical community. Nogaret, as the agent of papal decadence and royal greed, secures the necessary confessions (via torture) and the Crown proceeds to relieve the self-indicted servants of Satan of their revenues. The motives were utilitarian, the method traditional. Neither aspect fits the Soviet pattern. It could only be made to fit if we are prepared to turn to the explanation, repeated most recently by Isaac Deutscher, that the purges were truly motivated by the need to remove a dangerous governmental opposition. On this point Godin reports: "In the whole of my long prison career, apart from a few cases of frontier-jumping by minor Polish or Rumanian agents, I did not come across anything whatever that pointed to the real existence of any kind of counter-revolutionary activity."

I HAVE mentioned the totalitarian hunger for consistency, which in another and not less significant form appears as a hunger for *consent*. Consent, despite all his political successes, is what Stalin has never been able to command except by ruse and ruthlessness. The two great dictators of our time have both, after all, demanded 99 per cent approval in a public electoral show and have congratulated themselves on the subsequent almost unanimous mandate of the masses.

I doubt whether this was simply, on the part of the Nazis and Bolsheviks, the tribute that vice pays to democratic virtue. It was something more than that, something deeper. Totalitarianism lives only to a limited extent from propagandized myths. It feeds on its own pathological passions: it requires, in a world of enemies, its complete nation of friends; in a world of great danger and insecurity, its sense of supremacy among its own subjects.

In answering the question of why the NKVD took such trouble to extort confessions, the analogy of Jacobinism in the French Revolution is, I think, more revealing, and precisely because it is *not* parallel.

The "Law against Suspects," on the basis of which all "dangerous" elements could be guillotined without benefit of confession, was intended to protect the radical direction of the French Revolution. The Moscow Trials, in which all elements were required to proclaim their own guilt, were intended to protect the spiritual sickness of the once revolutionary Stalinist state. There seems to be a difference between the violent reprisals of a closed totalitarian regime and the terror of a still open revolutionary order. The revolutionary terrorists accept the fact of opposition, recognize their enemies, fight them, eliminate them. A revolution *needs* its enemies, but the Jacobin terror never stabilized itself sufficiently to allow itself the paranoiac luxury of inventing them.

In its own open period—the time of tangible class enemies, aristocrats, Whites, even kulaks—Bolshevism followed the same pattern. Enemies were fought and eliminated, not tricked and betrayed: no contrived confessions were needed, none wanted. Revolutionary drive indeed required victims, and opponents were legitimate prey in the arena of political contest. But under a totalitarian regime, where politics itself has been liquidated, enemies must be part of the whole official society, must repent and be absorbed—even if as corpses or prisoners. The totality allows nothing outside of itself. This is history's severest patriarchy, a closed house, without prodigal sons, where there is only the all-embracing father, his seamless web of power, and his devouring hunger for consent.

Qualitatively, Stalin's totalitarianism is a singular phenomenon, unique in human experience. Even the organized murderousness of Hitler's state assumed the objective recognition of opponents—the Jews were not asked to renounce Moses for Wotan! And in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, for example, in the final section "relating to the judicial proceedings in both the ecclesiastic and civil courts against witches and indeed all heretics," there is a flexibility which appears to us almost as a kind of Inquisitorial liberalism. There is a method of passing sentence "upon one who hath confessed to Heresy, but is not Peni-

tent," another "upon one who hath confessed to Heresy but is Relapsed, Albeit Now Penitent," another "upon one who hath Confessed to Heresy but is Impenitent, although not Relapsed," another upon "one who has Confessed to Heresy, is Relapsed and is also Impenitent," and finally—as never happens in Moscow—upon "one Taken and Convicted, but Denying Everything." The Total Confessor of Moscow permits no impenitence, no denials, no relapse. The possibility of a man in his senses thinking differently from the state must never be acknowledged.

Mention might be made here of the new systematization of "self-criticism" within all the Iron Curtain Communist parties. What this really amounts to is the Moscow Trials in permanence! The German party has just completed six months of "self-criticism," that is, confessions of the card-holders to the high priests of the inner party. Again, what is wanted here is a complete and constantly reasserted ideological and spiritual monopoly rather than the mere fiction of consent. The party must own every subject every moment, in life and death—body *and* soul. Here is a sovereign more absolute than any Oriental potentate of history—a god more jealous and unforgiving than any Baal.

HOWEVER, it is one thing to say that the Stalinist terror is historically unique, and quite another to try to use this uniqueness for the purpose of surreptitious apologetics. Thus, it is often said that Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia represent two "fundamentally different" types of government and ideology. This is a false and dangerous illusion. The *historical* uniqueness of Stalinism should not blind us to the fact that *morally* and *politically* it is identical with Nazism.

The roots of this error are, I feel, in the residual naivety of liberal idealism: Communism was always considered the perhaps hot-headed child of enlightenment and rationalism, while fascism was the black spawn of the nihilists. The socialism of Lenin and Stalin could only be considered as a vile betrayal of ideals otherwise valid. Thought

to be invalid in themselves and dangerous, on the other hand, were the ideals of the conservative and reactionary ideologues who, out of a pessimistic sense of man's imperfection, hoped for the preservation of older values in an organic, traditional community. The latter were the "children of darkness," the former the "children of light."

But I am afraid that in the perspective of today our shading of the picture must be a little subtler. Both movements, socialism and conservative-reaction, have their libertarian and their authoritarian potential. The great divide is no longer between Burke and the French Revolution, between the enlightened forward-lookers and the irrational backward-lookers. To be sure, differences continue to separate them; but the new and most vital consideration (the "fundamental" one, as we like to say) is the potential on both sides for the eventual association of brute force with an infallible ideology. Can we still feel charm in the rhetoric of Rousseau and Saint-Just, and dismay at the hardheadedness of Tocqueville and Burckhardt? Not by the color of their words shall we recognize our enemies, but by their ultimate willingness to accept ruthless violence in the service of a dogmatic social ideal.

The authors of *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession* like to distinguish between the "rationalism" of the Stalinist authority and the "emotional sadism" of the Nazis. "Conditions in Soviet camps may in many ways have been quite as severe as those in Nazi camps, and yet they were of quite a different nature. Mass extermination of prisoners, experiments on them, giving them fatal injections, or making them do obviously useless work to humiliate them were things completely alien to the Soviet regime. Soviet severity was rational, not emotional."

But why should the fatal brutality of the Siberian salt mines and Arctic snow be considered "rational" or somehow more humane than the gas chambers? And isn't "completely alien" an unfortunate phrase when one thinks of the evidence of Katyn, of the Poles in *The Dark Side of the Moon*, of the NKVD state in Eastern Germany? However,

commenting on Felix Dzerzhinsky, father of the GPU, the authors quite correctly remark: "Service to an abstract idea can lead to cruelty on a scale which personal feeling is quite incapable of. That is the only explanation of certain aspects of the Soviet system." It is certainly a truer account of Dachau and Karaganda, Buchenwald and Kolyma, than the hasty distinction previously offered. There is a point reached by totalitarian coercion where neither "rational" nor "emotional" motives have any meaning. Differences in Communist and Nazi theory or in Russian and German practice become accidents of history. Was it "rational" to demand confessions? Most of the unfortunate victims were to have no public trial anyway. Would it not have been far more reasonable to be content with what naked power could accomplish silently and secretly?

THE Hitlerite eliminates millions of Jews out of pathological conviction that their existence is incompatible with the "new order" to be established. The Stalinist eliminates millions of kulaks and millions of "foreign agents" out of suspicion and fear that his regime is insecure. These are, at bottom, different convulsions of similarly diseased minds. What is basic to the affliction is the blood bond between violence and the abstract idea—the union of absolute power and an absolute ideology.

It is an illusion to believe, with Beck and Godin, that "the doctrine of the *Untermensch*, the sub-man, the intrinsically inferior human being, is completely foreign to Soviet ideology and to the Soviet idea of justice." In the total police state all men are sub-men, every individual is a potential *Untermensch*. Hitler came to understand this too. On the last day of his life, crushed in his Berlin Bunker, he pronounced that the Germans too were inferior, inadequate creatures, incapable of fulfilling the historic mission he had assigned them. But Stalin has always known the utter unworthiness of man, and as he listened to the confessions in the Moscow Trials from his hidden courtroom box, he must have felt that he had proved it.

JEWISH WORK-CAMP IN INDIANAPOLIS

The Younger Generation Rolls Up Its Sleeves

IRWIN STARK

ON a weekday afternoon last August, the rabbi of the Orthodox Central Hebrew Congregation of Indianapolis stood surveying a group of young white men and women of college age who were at work building a modest five-room house in an Indianapolis slum. One boy, stripped to the waist, had shaped up a block of Indiana limestone and was carrying it to the Negro who waited to cement it into place. Another was helping a second Negro shovel dirt into a ditch. Two girls in blue jeans were hammering shingles on the sun-baked roof. "Yes—" the rabbi murmured as if answering a question he had posed for himself. "But how can I convince anyone else that such a thing has really happened?"

The rabbi's reaction was not uncommon among those who knew what was going on in Indianapolis during the summer of 1951. Despite the fact that the slowly receding shadow of Jim Crow was still very much in evidence, and that one needed no seismograph to sense the tremors which radiated from the Cicero riot in July, these young white people were working side by side with

twenty-one colored members of a housing co-operative and living in the Negro section of the city. Seven hours each day they shingled roofs, dug ditches, hauled and cut Indiana limestone, painted, nailed roof-boards and siding, moved prefabricated walls into place. After working hours they talked with representatives of labor, management, social welfare agencies, and religious organizations, went on field trips to industrial plants and public institutions, and spent Sundays visiting churches and fraternizing with members of the community. All this fitted into the familiar work-camp pattern developed almost two decades ago by the American Friends Service Committee—the Quakers. But, as the rabbi knew, this particular work-camp in Indianapolis was significantly different from anything thus far attempted. It marked the first time that one had been conducted under Jewish auspices.

UNTIL the past year the social idealism of numerous young Jews had found expression in America only through the service affiliates of liberal Christian sects. Under the aegis of Friends, Unitarians, Congregationalists, and similar groups, Jewish students worked in depressed mining communities, farm areas, and city slums, where they constructed playgrounds, health centers, and homes, repaired rural schools, and helped improve urban tenements. In most cases they paid for the privilege. Their only compensation was the satisfaction of meaningful labor and a more profound understanding of social problems.

To overstress the Jewish contribution would be unfair to the spirit in which this work has been carried on. But in view of the alleged "general slackening of idealism and of vital interest in the intellectual life and

LAST summer, a group of Jewish students decided to pass up their annual vacations and they went out to the Negro slums of Indianapolis to help build houses for poor families. They had responded to the invitation of the newly formed American Jewish Society for Service, set up by a group of rabbis who felt that the age-old Jewish humanistic tradition was perhaps being interpreted too parochially, as referring to Jewish humanity alone. IRWIN STARK, New York City high school teacher, was selected as leader of the group; he here gives an account of that summer in Indianapolis. Mr. Stark appeared previously in COMMENTARY with the story "Shock Treatment" (August 1946), later reprinted in Martha Foley's collection of best short stories for that year.

movements for social betterment" which, according to a recent article by Morris Freedman in *COMMENTARY* (October 1951), characterizes the contemporary Jewish student, the extent of Jewish participation may be worth noting. An analysis of 1950 Quaker work-camps, for example, reveals that among senior campers professing religious affiliations Jewish students ranked third and constituted 10 per cent of the total; among junior campers (of high school age) Jewish students ranked first and constituted 25 per cent of the total. These statistics would indicate that the situation may not be so uniformly glum as many have been led to believe.

Was there, however, a place in American life for a comparable Jewish organization to meet the needs of young men and women who might prefer to act as Jews in carrying out the ethical directives of their faith? Answering the question affirmatively, Rabbis Ferdinand M. Isserman of St. Louis, Arthur M. Lelyveld of the Hillel Foundations, and Isidore B. Hoffman of the three Jewish students' societies of Columbia University moved jointly with Henry Kohn, a New York attorney, to incorporate the American Jewish Society for Service as an independent organization in November 1950. It was decided to limit fund-raising to the amount necessary to carry out only a single project for the first year—a work-camp in the Negro slums of Indianapolis. A small corps of volunteers, interested men and women having little or no organizational experience but all confirmed in the belief that here was a good idea whose time had come at last, collected several thousand dollars and with the aid of Hillel recruited camp workers.

An even more important affirmative response came in the form of applications from college students in various parts of the country. Coming from what *Time* has so neatly packaged as "The Silent Generation," the response was hardly *sotto voce*. "I am Jewish," wrote one young man. "I am an American. I have certain ideals. Since the termination of World War II, we have been hearing and reading a good deal about Americanism and the democratic way of life.

I would rather live and do than shout and rant. This project is to me a fulfillment of a personal interpretation of several Jewish tenets." Another young man wrote, "I am eager to observe varied cultural problems at first hand and aid in their solution." A third declared, "I want to work at something in which I can feel a purpose and in which I can help other people. I would like experience in living with and understanding people from different backgrounds." No wonder that a staff writer who investigated the project for the *Indianapolis News* began a feature article on the camp with these words: "In a world of war, suspicion, and greed, don't sell idealism short yet. Something bobs up now and then to restore your faith in humanity and its future."

Who were these young people? No prig-gish "do-gooders," they seemed as average as any young men and women born in the depression years and matured in an era of war and threatened war. The youngest was a Methodist from Louisville who had worked as an arc welder the past year and hoped to go to Center College in the fall. Another was a graduate student in the planning department of the University of Chicago, an active member of Hillel, who was working his way through school. A third, a boy majoring in government, was also a student at Chicago. There was a boy who had taught Hebrew and was taking courses towards his doctorate in political science at Columbia. From City College came a veteran who had seen action in the Pacific, spent some time in Israel, and was currently studying photography in the evening session. One girl, a recent graduate of the day session at the same college, planned to teach history in the New York high schools, while from Pratt Institute came a girl interested in a career as a nutritionist. This was the group finally chosen by the AJSS for its pilot project in Indianapolis.

THE site selected for the work-camp had little to offer as a summer resort. John Gunther has called Indianapolis the dirtiest city in the United States and while this is an

exaggeration of the general picture it is the plain truth for several deteriorated areas. "A Northern city with a Southern exposure," it contains the greatest percentage of Negroes north of the Mason and Dixon Line. It has watched the KKK parade in its streets, and its slums are worse than those of Chicago, Memphis, Birmingham, or Washington. *Survey Graphic* has described these slums as "streets and streets of hovels, the streets often only muddy paths. Many of these hovels have no toilets and no running water. A group of families patronizes a community privy and a community pump. Beyond the slum is a vast dump heap, ragged gravel pits and then a stream. . . . One shack with an assessed valuation of \$850, which would seem an exaggeration, rents for \$25 a month. Nearby is a coal shed rented to a family at \$7 a month. It even has a street number and there is a service flag in the window." Six years ago an act of the state legislature authorized the city to buy this area under the power of eminent domain in order to redevelop it and provide decent dwellings for its residents. Real-estate interests bitterly fought every attempt to carry the act out, but finally a Negro settlement house under the leadership of its director, Cleo Blackburn, and with the financial backing of religious and philanthropic foundations, succeeded in purchasing a tract of land for a self-help housing project. Today Flanner House Homes, Inc. consists of twenty-one Negro families who are building their own homes on this land. The aim of the AJSS work-camp was to help them in the actual day-to-day construction.

Using army cots borrowed from the Red Cross and orange crates donated by a local supermarket, the campers set up headquarters at the Indiana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, within walking distance of the project. Accommodations were of the simplest. A single bathroom served fifteen adults (including the eight Negro tenants) and only a debilitated electric fan ventilated the attic where most of the campers slept. But the crowded schedule of camp life left little time to worry about such creature

concerns. A normal working day began with 7 A.M. reveille. Chow came a half hour later, followed by clean-up. By nine, campers had signed in at the project and received their assignments for the day. After eight hours, with a regular break for lunch at Flanner House and an occasional break for a field trip, they returned to the clubhouse where supper and a discussion or an educational meeting awaited them. Speakers, who were usually supper guests, found themselves deep in their subjects long before dessert, and the two or three hours of heated, often acrimonious discussion which followed were rarely enough to iron out all the unsolved problems of the universe. Sooner or later all discussions became involved with principles and theories: a Steel Workers' organizer who came to explain problems of unionizing spent the greater part of the evening defending the role of the CIO in the national political scheme; a rabbi who came to describe the situation of Jews in Indianapolis ended by engaging in a debate on the relation between science and religion; the vice-president of the city's largest department store was forced into an apologia for the store's policy on the hiring of Negroes. The evening frequently closed with campers too weary to notice the lack of innerspring mattresses or cross-ventilation. In these matters the first Jewish work-camp was not remarkably different from its Gentile counterparts.

IN ITS planning, however, the AJSS was aware that there could be no valid reason for a camp that merely duplicated already existing facilities. If this was to be a Jewish work-camp, should it be so in name only, or should it, like other denominational camps, emphasize the distinctive religious elements of its motivation? While acknowledging the inter-denominational composition of this camp, the AJSS answered the question by requesting campers to weigh the possibilities of religious observance as well as the study and discussion of some relevant Jewish text.

After considering the matter among themselves, the campers decided that though they were opposed to conducting religious serv-

ices within the house, Friday nights should be consecrated to the Sabbath, leaving Saturdays free for those who wished to attend synagogue services. Candles, *challah*, and wine were therefore made a part of the table setting for the Sabbath, and the traditional blessings were said in Hebrew and in English during and after the meal. The first Sabbath was awkward and self-conscious; for most campers it had been a custom more honored in the breach than in the observance. But after a week of hard manual labor, the beginning of the day of rest assumed a significance few had fully savored before. The mood was one of quiet satisfaction to which each brought the sense of a personal achievement shared now in a fellowship that became more than the fellowship of men alone: God too had rested on the seventh day, and had decreed rest. The only dissident note was introduced by a Jewish camper, a vehement anti-ritualist, who contended that the observance violated his beliefs. It was the Methodist camper who proposed that he solve his conscientious objections by merely absenting himself from the religious moments of the meal. The Methodist remained to participate with the others.

Saturday was devoted to rest and prayer, with most campers worshipping at an Orthodox synagogue discovered after several weeks of trial and error. The obscure Sephardic congregation in the old Jewish section of South Indianapolis and the opulent Conservative congregation in the newer Northwest section were too distant for regular pilgrimages; two of the campers refused to ride on the Sabbath. On the other hand, the nearby Reform congregation, where the presence of the campers one Saturday morning just about made a *minyan*, proved a disappointment even for those who had habitually attended Reform services at home. The absence of the regular rabbi, who was on vacation, seemed an insufficient excuse for the drab and perfunctory worship which they witnessed. Without singing, without feeling, without worshipers, it proved a depressing and embarrassing occasion. The contrasting service at the Orthodox synagogue

was a spiritual tonic. Long, difficult to follow, and typically noisy, it impressed one nevertheless as a sincerely felt religious occasion. Not only were the campers invited to the platform during the reading from the Torah (one of the boys, a Cohen, was given a portion to recite), but when they were urged to join a Bar Mitzvah luncheon which boasted *gefilte fish* and homemade sponge cake, they knew they were "in" at last.

ONCE each week after work, campers met to discuss selected chapters from Milton Steinberg's *Basic Judaism*, their reactions varying in accordance with their position in the religious spectrum. The anti-ritualist was repelled by the blurred quasi-poetical style, and sharply critical of the view that God was a necessary postulate for anything, including a system of ethics. Reform Jews among the campers felt that Steinberg's approach was insufficiently rational and rejected the concept of a personal God. The Orthodox maintained that God was above discussion, that ritual was its own justification, and that Steinberg didn't make much sense anyhow. To underline the point, one of the Orthodox campers substituted a reading from *Pirke Aboth* ("Ethics of the Fathers") for the scheduled exposition of Steinberg's chapter on the good life, and much to the surprise of the others, the discussion that followed was the liveliest of the summer.

Any generalization about the religious attitudes of young Jewish men and women based on these limited experiences can hardly pretend to much statistical validity. If anything, they indicated a dichotomy of emotional needs and intellectual concepts that appears to be characteristic of so many young people today. Except for the anti-ritualist, they were all seeking a satisfactory form of worship. Except for the Orthodox, they wanted, and felt the inadequacy of, rational justification; the incongruity of reason and worship was a difficulty they had not yet resolved for themselves. Lacking anything better, they seemed to prefer the traditional worship of the synagogue to the prosaic ceremony of extreme Reform which they en-

countered in Indianapolis. But at the same time, they were unwilling to be led by their emotions into the ideological rationalizations of Orthodoxy, were unwilling to accept even Steinberg's mediate position.

How the Jewish community would react to the camp continued to be a moot question for some weeks. In a city where Jews number only a small fraction, where a Jewish proletariat is non-existent or carefully concealed, where "Hoosier" and "Americanism" are practically synonymous and the Negro ghetto is taken for granted, there was an understandable doubt that a Jewish work-camp located in a Negro slum would be welcomed with anything approaching Hasidic enthusiasm. Some contacts had been arranged in advance, but the arrival of the work-camp unfortunately coincided with the vacations of the few Jews who had promised to introduce the campers to the Jewish community. Even a pre-season article on the camp in the *National Jewish Post*, which is published and widely read in Indianapolis, had no visible effect for the first two weeks. The break came only when the campers decided to take a night off for swimming at the Kirshbaum Center, a Jewish community house. Here they met a group of young people, were invited to a Sunday picnic, and, in return, invited the community group to visit the clubhouse and join them on the project.

The picnic at Noblesville, a kind of suburban Coney Island, was well attended if considerably disorganized. The reciprocal social evening at the clubhouse was better attended and featured "coolaide," cookies, chit-chat, and movies. But with a few exceptions the young people of Kirshbaum Center made themselves scarce for the rest of the summer. After all, they were not radically different from their big-city prototypes. Primarily interested in diversion, anything so earnest as a work-camp held little attraction for the great majority. And yet there were a few who seemed to be looking for something else and who returned after the polite social evening to join in individual bull sessions and educational meetings. "This is the first time,"

one of them later confessed, "that I have had a chance to engage in a serious discussion since coming to Indianapolis five years ago." Only a single member of the group, a medical student at Indiana University, became a genuine participant in the life of the camp, worked on the project after his summer job ended at four each day, ate at the house with the rest of the campers, and actively shared in the educational program.

To generalize about the attitude of the adult Jewish community is somewhat more difficult. If it included a prominent local Zionist who questioned the wisdom of diverting attention from the situation in Israel, it also included a rabbi and a professor of economics who believed that the camp was an important creative innovation for modern Judaism. If it included a businessman who could not understand why Jewish young people should be working without pay for colored people, it included another businessman who mixed with the project workers, gave a much needed job to the wife of a project member, and donated a luxurious five-gallon thermos to Flanner House Homes. It included a school teacher, an ardent Zionist, who entertained the campers at dinner and spoke of her intention to volunteer her services to Flanner House on a part-time basis. It included the editor of the *National Jewish Post*, who spread the gospel of the camp in news stories and editorials. Whatever the reaction in the beginning, the publicity which the camp received at the end of the summer in the city's leading newspapers must have convinced the most skeptical.

IF CONTACTS with the Jewish community remained peripheral, those with the Negro community were continually central. It is true that with the exception of a brief descriptive article in the local Negro weekly, no public notice was taken of the camp. Nevertheless, the work on the housing project was widely known throughout the city. Campers were seen in Douglas Park, reserved for Negroes, where they were probably the first white people to use the park's segregated swimming pool. They met scores of Negroes

at Flanner House and hundreds of others at the Indiana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. In the neighborhood they were recognized on the street and answered many a friendly "Hi, neighbor!" as they returned begrimed and exhausted from a day's work.

Their closest contacts were, of course, with the men on the project. Most of these twenty-one Negroes had come directly out of the surrounding slums, from which, partly as a result of the incentive offered by the project, they had pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps. For many of them, however, the idea of a self-help housing cooperative was still difficult to grasp. An undercurrent of cynicism often ran close to the surface and the ambivalent dependence on and suspicion of the white supervisor was not entirely eliminated by the encouragement of leadership from their own group. The realities of race prejudice were all too vivid all around them. One man, for example, told how he had broken in a white boy on his job only to watch the latter given the foreman's position which should rightfully have been given to him, an incident to which should be appended the postscript that subsequently the colored man was elected shop steward in a predominantly white section of the plant. And campers witnessed another incident which highlighted the color relationship unforgettably: a white truck driver drove his vehicle down the main street of the project in defiance of a city ordinance, and a Negro project worker, a husky ex-GI, pointed to the warning sign, but the truck driver only yelled a scornful "Go to hell!" and, while the Negro stood there choking back his fury, drove complacently to his destination.

Coming as they did from an agrarian community in the South, many Negroes were unaccustomed to deal with the abstractions of a money economy; long-range budgeting was a serious problem. The "man-hour" concept—each man had contracted to work a minimum of twenty hours a week on his own or a neighbor's house—was another abstraction which demanded the ability to recognize that when an individual loafed or

made a mistake in construction the cost would eventually become a corporate assessment. Despite the fact that one house had already been completed and occupied by a project member, a legless veteran, and that eight others were in various stages of construction by the end of last summer, it required considerable imagination to envision the finished community of twenty-one houses. Intra-group relations were another factor of trigger-like sensitivity among families where the smallest differentials of background, job status, education, and color might be magnified to proportions not easily comprehended by the casual white observer. These distinctions were especially felt among the wives.

How the work-campers altered the habits and thought processes of these families forms the substance of a lengthy report by Fred Reeve, a dedicated Quaker who is the supervisor of the building project. The following excerpts are typical: "A high level of conversation, readiness to accept outsiders, lessened suspicion, and greater rapport among the builders themselves and with management are all noticeable to a considerable extent. The staff feels definitely that these have happened largely as a result of the close relationship with the campers. . . . Cynicism toward management and the ideals of the project disappeared almost entirely during the time of the work-camp. . . . Concepts of the place of women in the social structure grew during the summer as a result of the two girl campers participating in the project work whenever they could. The past two months three of the wives spent extensive time on the project. This was not accepted previously. . . . Great pride is now taken by the majority of the men in being on the project on Sundays to explain to the many visitors details of their approach in solving their housing problem. . . . We feel beyond doubt that the stereotyped concept previously held of Jewish people completely disappeared. There is still amazement expressed that Jews would do manual work, let alone give their services. . . . New contacts

were opened in this community between two large minority groups which would likely never have been established."

But how measure the effect of the experience on the campers themselves when the most important lessons are in the kinds of things that elude measurement? How measure the sense of identity which is the outcome of common sweat, blisters, and the pride of small successes? Or a new insight: that a basement, for example, is more than an expensive addition to a house, that for people who have lived in shacks with earth as a floor, it is a critical gauge of status and stability? Or the response of a school-age child who played the violin and didn't have a piece of rosin for her bow—and the sudden bright smile when you bought a piece for her? Or your feelings when the members of the housing project gave a picnic dinner in appreciation of the work-camp, with all the food bought by them and prepared on their severely rationed time? Or going to a Negro church, where you realized for the first time the role of an intensely dramatic religion in the life of its colored congregation and where the greeting rang to you, "Welcome, brother"? Or the voice of a Negro whose house you have worked on from the beginning: "By God—you going to come back some day and stay in this here house just as long as you want"? Or the old colored lady who stopped by one day to ask if you couldn't please build her a new privy—out of Indiana limestone? Or the sense of accomplishment and well-being when, having scrubbed yourself clean of paint and tar and just plain dirt, you put on your best suit and come down to the dining room on the Sabbath for the lighting of the candles?

These are the intangibles which must ultimately justify the existence of the American Jewish Society for Service. How much sweetness and light it spreads is irrelevant, and Dr. Margoshes' statement in the *Yiddish Day* that "a half-dozen Jewish young men who are staying in the summer's heat in the Negro quarters of Indianapolis to help build homes for poor families can do more to raise

Jewish worth in America and to combat anti-Semitism than the half-million dollars raised by Jewish organizations to fight anti-Semitism," is not only an exaggeration but, however well-intentioned, a misconstruction of the guiding purpose of the AJSS.

IT is, indeed, one of the curious ironies of history that a religion which professes a universal God and a universal ethic should have been compelled by the demands of survival to concentrate so much of its energy on the desperate needs of its own people. Not that we can blink away the parochialism of "a people that dwelt alone," and the sturdy planks of a particularism that helped build "a fence around the Law." But even if we knew nothing of the rabbinic tradition or rejected the interpretation of the Covenant relationship as found in Zechariah and Deutero-Isaiah, there would remain ample evidence of the emphasis on universal brotherhood in Judaism. Amos' declaration that the Ethiopians are as precious in the sight of God as the children of Israel, Isaiah's assertion that the sacrifices of the alien may be brought to the Temple and be acceptable to God because "My house shall be a house of prayer unto all peoples," and the transcendent ideal of the book of Jonah, which directs the prophet to serve the people of pagan Nineveh—these surely present eloquent testimony. Unhappily for the traditional stress of the Jewish God as the God of all men, history has forced Jewish community action into comparatively narrow channels. This does not mean that Jewish philanthropy has been exclusively self-centered. But by and large, Jewish charity has begun and stayed at home.

If, however, the stress on the universal is integral to the Jewish idea of God, it would seem that at a moment when struggle for survival is somewhat less bitter than usual we ought to turn a part of our energies in this direction. This is what the American Jewish Society for Service has done. This is what it plans to do in conflict areas throughout the country. Not as an act of charity, or of public relations, but as an act of faith.

BREAD AND DEMOCRACY IN GREECE

A Case Study in Marshall Plan Politics

MAURICE J. GOLDBLOOM

THE vegetable man was of course somewhat amused by my stumbling pidgin Greek, but he was also pleased—particularly because he could speak no English. He was even more pleased to learn that I was an American. “Americans,” he declared, “are good people.” I said that I thought people were pretty good everywhere in the world. “But in America it is good, here it is no good,” he replied. “In America you have socialism; here we have no socialism.” It took quite a bit of explaining to persuade him that, while in America the ordinary man was indeed well off, we did not actually have socialism. But I think that conversation does deserve to be set down as one of the more successful efforts of American propaganda, since the explanation satisfied him so well that he ended up by presenting me with a peach.

My vegetable man was expressing in a somewhat crude form the feeling that the average Greek worker or peasant has about the United States. For to most Greeks the United States is, par excellence, the country where an ordinary man gets a break. This

AMERICA's intervention in helping to repulse the Communist threat in Greece has been a matter of much concern among liberals sensitive to charges of “American imperialism.” Here, MAURICE J. GOLDBLOOM, just returned to this country after serving in Greece as Labor Information Officer to the ECA mission, looks at the record. Mr. Goldbloom maintains that, while Greece has not been transformed into a paragon of the democratic virtues, United States intervention has brought progress and hope to a situation once completely desperate; and he raises the question whether America should not have “interfered” more. Mr. Goldbloom was one of the writers of “The Month in History,” the monthly analysis of world events which ran regularly in COMMENTARY until September 1948.

feeling antedates American aid; it comes primarily from the fact that large numbers of Greeks have friends and relatives in this country who, starting from nothing, have achieved not only comfort for themselves but a surplus to send to the folks at home.

Such sentiments, however, are not to be found equally at all levels of society or in all sections of the political spectrum. Anti-Americanism is not uncommon on the right and among the wealthy, to whom the steps this country has taken toward economic equality—particularly when we suggest that Greece might do well to imitate some of them—are abhorrent. Everything that America stands for—political, social, and educational equality alike—threatens the perpetuation of the oligarchy of speculators, monopolists, and rentiers living on foreign holdings which it is their primary purpose in life to maintain and expand. And since a large proportion of the Greek fortunes today trace at least in part to profitable transactions made under the occupation during the last war, it is not surprising that their possessors have no deep-rooted admiration for American democracy. True, there are few among them so foolish as to desire a complete American withdrawal from Greece. American financial aid they regard as no more than their just due, but American supervision and advice in connection with its utilization they consider wholly unnecessary evils.

So long as the country remained in a state of civil war, conditions were made to order for the realization of right-wing ambitions. Suggestions for reforms could be more or less politely shrugged aside, with a calm assurance based on the knowledge that our national prestige was committed to the defeat of the Communist guerrillas. So long as these remained an active and substantial

menace, American aid could be taken for granted, and American advice could be rejected with impunity. Moreover, domestic critics and political opponents could be denounced indiscriminately as Communists or fellow-travelers. If they were too persistent and not protected by one form or another of "connection," they could be brought before the notorious special courts-martial which had jurisdiction over political offenses and sentenced to long prison terms or even death, or they could be sent to concentration camps by simple administrative action, usually on the recommendation of local security committees—drawn, of course, primarily from ultra-rightist elements.

In Athens itself, conditions were somewhat better than elsewhere in the country, since events in the capital received some degree of newspaper coverage both in Greece and abroad, and the city contained many foreign observers. But in large areas of the countryside, and even in the smaller cities, there was little check on the abuses committed in the name of "anti-Communism" and "nationalism." To be sure, American and British representatives in Greece occasionally intervened to correct particularly flagrant miscarriages of justice when these came to their attention, but only a small proportion of such cases, particularly outside Athens, ever did come to their attention, or could have been dealt with by them even if they had been known. Moreover, both powers—especially our own—were very reluctant to do anything that might be interpreted as interference with Greek administration of internal security problems. Civil servants who hesitated to comply with the wishes of rightist ministers were, of course, even easier to deal with.

UNDER these circumstances it required a certain hardihood for any except the most strongly situated to engage in criticism, and large-scale corruption flourished unchecked. Thus it was later revealed that during this period almost the entire revenues of the Port of Piraeus were stolen by the right-wing politicians who administered it.

(Part of the funds abstracted from the port administration served to subsidize the newspaper *Oi Karoi*, organ of the sometime Prime Minister Constantine Tsaldaris, leader of the rightist Populist party; Tsaldaris's son also got a substantial loan from the embezzler-in-chief.)

While the civil war lasted, economic and fiscal reforms therefore remained well outside the pale of polite conversation. And the Americans were as yet unready to talk impolitely, whatever the provocation. Even taking into account all the difficulties of the situation, it may be legitimately questioned whether British and American policy did enough during this period to strengthen and encourage democratic forces and prevent excesses by the right. But if we were not always so effective as might be wished in pushing for progressive policies, we were certainly not the wellsprings of reaction which some liberal journals were apt to proclaim us. And even during the civil war, Anglo-American influence did succeed in compelling the right to share office—though seldom power—with the moderates, and blocked repeated attempts by the anti-parliamentary section of the right to establish an overt dictatorship.

In the latter half of 1949 the Communist guerrillas, who had received most of their equipment from Yugoslavia, collapsed after the break between Tito and the Cominform. (The reorganization of the Greek army which had taken place under the auspices of Marshal Papagos, supported by the American military mission, had greatly reduced the corruption and political favoritism which had paralyzed it in the early part of the civil war. But despite the substantial increase in military efficiency that resulted, there can be little doubt that the guerrillas would have been able to maintain their resistance considerably longer had they not been deprived of their Yugoslav base.)

THE END of the Communist military threat automatically produced a significant shift in the political situation. On the one hand, rightist politicians could no longer blackmail

the Americans by asserting that any decrease in their support would mean an immediate Communist triumph. On the other, they were no longer able to get away with murder (literally as well as figuratively) in terms of the Greek domestic situation. Where the civil war had driven people into the arms of the right for fear of a Communist victory—or into the arms of the Communists as a reaction against rightist excesses—a process of de-polarization now rapidly developed. Under the caretaker government of John Theotokis, appointed to conduct the parliamentary elections of March 1950, restrictions on civil liberties were relaxed. The elections themselves were relatively free, although significant right-wing terrorism still existed in many rural areas and control of the army and gendarmerie gave rightist candidates an advantage in the military vote.

The elections resulted in a large-scale repudiation of the right. The rightist Populist party, which had an absolute majority in the parliament chosen in 1946 (in an election boycotted not only by the Communists but by most of the non-Communist left and center) lost heavily, both to parties of the center and to splinter parties of the right. While the Populists still remained the largest single party, all the right-wing parties combined polled only about 42 per cent of the vote. Four parties, ranging from left center to right center, received 46 per cent of the total. Most impressive was the success of the left center EPEK (National Progressive Union of the Center), led by General Nicholas Plastiras; this party, formed just before the election, and subject to interference by the gendarmerie in rural areas, polled over one-sixth of the vote. (The Liberals, who were the traditional center party, were distinguished from the parliamentarian right principally by a historical—but no longer active—distaste for the monarchy, by a somewhat greater concern for civil liberties, and by their reverence for the name of the late Eleftherios Venizelos. The so-called Democratic Socialist party of George Papandreou took a roughly similar position, the "Socialist" part of its name being no

more significant than in the case of the French Radical Socialist party of Edouard Daladier. In contrast, Plastiras had a real concern, if scarcely a clear-cut program, for economic reform in the interest of the Greek masses.) Almost as striking was the performance of the Democratic Front, which served as the political vehicle of the outlawed Communist party, although most of its candidates were not themselves Communists and a large part of them could not properly be described as fellow-travelers. Unable to campaign freely in many parts of the country, this group nominated candidates in only a limited number of constituencies; yet nationally it polled 10.6 per cent, and in the three largest cities it topped the poll with an average of about 22 per cent of the total.

AS SOON as the voting trend became clear, the leaders of the three major center parties—General Plastiras, Sophocles Venizelos, and George Papandreou—agreed on the formation of a coalition government with Plastiras as Prime Minister. This result was not at all pleasing to the defeated right; it now saw not only the power but the plums of office slipping from its grasp, and Plastiras personally was anathema to it because of his execution of several rightist cabinet ministers in 1922. The court camarilla in particular set out to drive a wedge between Plastiras and Venizelos by holding out to the latter the bait of rightist support for a cabinet headed by himself if he would desert the centrist alliance. But when Venizelos, at the urging of the palace, did form such a cabinet, he found himself faced with opposition from an unexpected source.

American and British representatives in Athens made it very clear that they thought a Plastiras government was what the situation required, and that certainly no government dependent on rightist parliamentary support could meet the needs of Greece. In part, this attitude was dictated by considerations of international politics. A rapprochement between Greece and Yugoslavia stood high on the priority list of Western policy, and Washington and London felt that the elimi-

nation of ultra-rightist influence from the Greek government was a prerequisite for this. But in part the decision was also motivated by the belief that Greece required a government capable of carrying out a policy of internal reconciliation, and of cleaning out the rot which had permeated the government.

When more tactful indications of displeasure failed to send Venizelos back to the centrist alliance, American Ambassador Henry Grady sent—and published—a note to the Venizelos government demanding a large number of overdue reforms and making it clear that we would only be satisfied by a government with a parliamentary and popular majority capable of carrying them out. While the note did not of course demand in so many words that a government of the center be formed, with Plastiras as Prime Minister, nobody in Greece had any doubt as to its meaning. Before the new parliament met the Venizelos government had handed in its resignation, and Plastiras was Prime Minister at the head of a three-party coalition.

THE Grady letter brought American prestige in Greece to what was probably the highest point it has so far reached. For once, we had made it clear—both to ourselves and to the Greek people—where we stood. Our intervention had prevented the popular will from being thwarted by backstairs manipulations. American policy had been sharply defined, it had been progressive, and, in alliance with the Greek people, it had carried the day.

The Plastiras government made haste to tackle the agenda of reforms laid down in the Grady letter. Perhaps its most spectacular success was the collection of several million dollars of unpaid back taxes from Greek shipowners, whom it brought to terms by ordering Greek consuls throughout the world to refuse them clearance papers. On the advice of ECA's civil government specialists, the government also took steps to decentralize the administrative system; previously the slightest details of local govern-

ment had required the approval of one or more ministries in Athens. It announced municipal elections, the first since 1934, and replaced the appointed municipal administrations then holding office with judges. (The standards of the ordinary courts in Greece are high, and they have always been held in general respect, unlike other branches of the government.) It reached an agreement with ECA on a comprehensive program of hydroelectric development and power production from Greek lignite, capable of serving as the basis for a substantial increase in Greek industry. It unified and revised civil service salary schedules, in accordance with proposals advanced by the ECA mission, so as to eliminate all secret and supplementary payments. It set out vigorously to reform the fiscal system, again along lines suggested by ECA experts. (One of them, however, complained to the writer that George Kartalis, Finance Minister in the Plastiras cabinet, had too many good ideas and wanted to put them into effect too quickly. This is the only time I ever heard an American level *that* particular accusation against a Greek minister!) Acting on the recommendations of a committee appointed by the short-lived Venizelos government, the new government removed the commandant of the Makronissos concentration camp, under whose administration serious abuse of prisoners had taken place, and introduced other penal reforms. And it attempted to deal with the ticklish problem of amnesty. But it was on this issue that it fell.

When the Plastiras government came to power, it found over 30,000 political prisoners in Greece, including about 3,000 under sentence of death. In proportion to population this was a figure comparable to what Hitler's Germany had had. Few of these prisoners, moreover, had ever been convicted by the regular Greek civil courts. Many had been sentenced by the special courts-martial, which had jurisdiction over political offenses throughout the whole of Greece. Even more were held without trial—a few even, almost six years after the liberation of Greece, for crimes committed against the quisling gov-

ernment and the German occupation authorities! The demand for an amnesty had formed an important plank in Plastiras's electoral platform. But he was able to move no further in this direction than his coalition partners were willing to permit. Consequently, a compromise was arrived at whereby all three government parties agreed to the passage of four bills. The first three of these provided procedures for the reexamination of individual cases; the fourth provided an amnesty for most of those who had been sentenced to less than ten years imprisonment. But when the laws were about to be promulgated, the Liberal party of Venizelos—who still desired the prime ministry for himself, and was hence eager to end the coalition—suddenly decided that it could not agree to the fourth. Plastiras agreed to withdraw it, but made clear that he had yielded reluctantly and still thought a broader amnesty desirable. Venizelos charged that he had thereby broken the unity of the coalition and ordered the Liberal ministers to withdraw from the cabinet. Plastiras wished to take the issue to the country, but the King refused to call new elections on the ground that the parliament offered other possibilities for forming a government.

MEANWHILE Henry Grady had been transferred to Iran in accordance with that most hallowed tradition of the American foreign service which recognizes that when a man has been in a country long enough to become really useful, he must be removed to another post as speedily as possible. The Greek right, which had been predicting Grady's removal ever since he first stepped on its toes, naturally regarded this as a triumphant demonstration of its influence in Washington and acted accordingly. Venizelos attempted to secure a vote of confidence for an all-Liberal cabinet, and, when he failed, was persuaded by the palace to form a coalition with Papandreou and Tsaldaris. The Populists were later forced out of the government, and the Populist party itself split, by a series of revelations concerning the peculations of various of

Tsaldaris's friends the last time the party had held office. Nevertheless, Venizelos managed to continue as the Prime Minister of a succession of minority cabinets, in collaboration with Papandreou and later alone, and to persuade a parliamentary majority to tolerate them on one basis or another. But new elections were imperative if Greece was to have a stable government, and the only question was when. One factor which made for delay was the influence of the new American ambassador John Peurifoy, who may have felt that it was up to the Greeks to supply an element of continuity at that time conspicuously lacking in the American personnel in Greece. (Not only was Grady succeeded first by an interregnum and then by Peurifoy, but ECA Mission Chief Paul Porter was promoted to Washington after about one year in Greece—another transfer which the Greek right regarded as a victory for itself—and the command of the American military mission changed twice in a year.)

Another cause of delay was the fear of the right and right center that new elections would mean substantial further gains for EPEK at their expense. This problem was finally resolved by an agreement among the three largest parties to revise the system of proportional representation in such a way as to favor the larger parties—that is, themselves—and eliminate most smaller groups.

If the new election law had worked out as it was intended to, there would have been three large parties, any two of which would have been in a position to form a government. Since there was little prospect of a Plastiras-Tsaldaris coalition, this meant in effect that Venizelos would be able to choose at all times between a right-wing partner and a left-wing one, and hence be in a position to determine policy fairly continuously. This prospect was reportedly not displeasing to the American Embassy, which had always found Venizelos a most agreeable man, ready to renew on the formation of each new cabinet under his prime ministership all the promises he had made after forming the previous ones.

Unfortunately for some of the mice and

men who had laid these plans, the palace again intervened—this time unintentionally. The King's appointment of the notoriously political general Ventiris as his military aide, together with some of the intrigues of the political director of the royal household, Boulis Metaxas, so incensed Field Marshal Papagos that he offered his resignation as commander-in-chief. Papagos, who with American backing had done a rather good job in reducing politics and corruption and increasing efficiency in the armed forces (although there was still a long way to go), had previously resisted all efforts to drag him into politics as the leader of a united rightist front. Now, however, he found all the political parties—which feared him as a potential rival—rallying to the support of the King against him. As a result he decided, after some months of sulking in his tent, to enter the elections as head of a new party called the Greek Rally. The principles of this party were not particularly clear; indeed, Papagos's policy speech sounded strangely like the pronouncements of Plastiras and even Venizelos. All called for a larger share in the national product for labor; all said Greece must make better use of American aid and be less dependent on it; all promised to combine economy in government with increased social services and better treatment for the civil servants; and all were of course for the closest cooperation with the United States in the international field and against Communism and all other forms of sin. Behind this similarity of language, however, real differences existed between the Plastiras and Papagos parties. Papagos's closest adviser, Spiros Markezinis, indeed recognized the need for major political and economic reforms similar to those advocated by Plastiras (and in large measure by ECA). But much of his support, and most of his candidates, came from those elements which had been the most obstinate opponents of reform.

WHEN, on September 9, 1951, the voters finally went to the polls, the three major parties received approximately 80 per

cent of the vote, and, by virtue of the new electoral law, 95 per cent of the seats in parliament. Tsaldaris, with 6.5 per cent of the vote, received only 2 seats out of 258 under the electoral law of which he had been a co-sponsor. But no party had a majority. Papagos led with 36.5 per cent of the votes and—when the allocation of mandates was completed after a month and a half of vote-counting and court battles—114 seats out of 258. But he had declared that he would under no circumstances collaborate with any other party, and he rejected a proposal of the King and Plastiras—now at last on good terms despite the fact that the royal family and the General had in the past taken turns in exiling each other—that he head an all-party government. (This solution was reputedly the one which the Americans regarded with the greatest favor; they certainly shuddered at Papagos's demand that the situation be resolved by immediate new elections under the majority system, a proposal which would inevitably have paralyzed the Greek government for some additional months.) The only other possibility offered by the composition of the new parliament was that of forming a Plastiras-Venizelos coalition, which commanded a parliamentary majority, though not an imposing one.

In the new government, the policies of Plastiras appear to be taking precedence over those of Venizelos. In the economic field, all the principal ministries have gone to members of EPEK. The key ministry of coordination has been assigned to George Kartalis, the intellectual leader of EPEK and an admirer of the British Labor party. And the government has called back as its economic adviser Greece's outstanding expert in this field, Kyriakos Varvaressos. The latter was Finance Minister for several months in 1945, and in that capacity made the one real effort since the war to reorganize Greece's economic and fiscal system in the interests of the Greek people as a whole. As a result, he earned the undying enmity of every entrenched economic group, and was driven from office by a well-financed press

campaign. The action of the new government in calling him back is a welcome guarantee that it will really attempt to stop up some of the leaks which have drained off a painfully large part of American aid in the past, and to force the well-to-do to bear some of the sacrifices which have hitherto been the monopoly of the Greek workers and peasants.

Although collaboration between Plastiras and Venizelos had previously broken down, ostensibly at least, over the amnesty issue, this did not prove a major obstacle to agreement. Nor is this altogether surprising, since the various Venizelos governments of the past year actually released about one-third of all the remaining political prisoners in Greece. The new coalition has agreed on measures which will free approximately half of those now left. Moreover, concentration camps and special courts-martial are to be abolished. Political cases will be brought before the regular courts, and persons whom it is still deemed necessary to hold under administrative detention will be sent to inhabited islands rather than held as prisoners. Seven such detainees, elected to parliament on a crypto-Communist ticket, have been released to take their seats. (Although the Communist party is illegal, its *alter ego*, the United Democratic Left, polled 10.5 per cent of the vote in the recent elections, and an Athens daily newspaper follows the party line faithfully.) The Minister of the Interior, responsible for carrying out amnesty measures as well as for administering policy on security questions in general, is Constantine Rendis, who last year went over from the Liberals to EPEK on the amnesty issue.

ALL in all, the new government is likely to achieve a large degree of political reform, and to liquidate much of the after-effects of the civil war. And in the economic field it may be expected to cooperate in fact as well as on paper in introducing most of the reforms which ECA proposes, and even to think up a few of its own.

Yet neither this government nor any other is likely to solve the basic economic problem

of Greece. For the simple fact is that Greece has a population twice what her eroded soil and meager natural resources are capable of supporting on a decent standard of living. Nor is industrialization a solution, although it can offer a certain degree of relief. Neither Greece's internal market nor her resources, including potential sources of power, are such as to permit large-scale or low-cost production. Her luxury agricultural exports, particularly fruit and tobacco, find themselves competing in an ever less favorable market. Her industrial products are potentially salable only in the Middle East, where a transportation differential gives them some hope of competing with goods from Western Europe and the United States. Yet even here, the probable rapid industrialization of some of the Arab states and Turkey—even if political considerations continue to minimize effective Israeli competition—make the market for Greek manufactures problematical at best. A considerable improvement could, indeed, be secured by mobilizing the very large foreign exchange earnings of Greek shipping and Greek investments abroad, as well as the income from Greek emigrant remittances. By and large, the first two sources of revenue now flow away from Greece entirely, into bank accounts in New York, London, or Zurich, while emigrant remittances serve to facilitate capital flight by means of black-market transactions.

No doubt Varvaressos and Kartalis will attempt to plug these leaks, and they may succeed in accomplishing at least a small amount in this direction. But any really substantial success would require the development of a sense of patriotism and public responsibility on the part of Greece's financial interests, a conviction on their part that Greece was as safe and profitable a place to invest as any other—neither of these possibilities seems at the moment to deserve serious consideration—or the active cooperation of the American and British treasuries in ferreting out and mobilizing privately held Greek resources in the two countries. There are precedents for such action and it could be profitable to the countries concerned, par-

ticularly, at the moment, our own. But it would undoubtedly meet with resistance from many powerful groups both in Wall Street and in the City.

For the present and the foreseeable future, Greece's balance of payments is going to require a substantial foreign—i.e., American—subsidy if even the present standard of living is to be maintained. And that standard, for the Greek masses, is today the lowest in Marshall Plan Europe, with the possible exception of the Iberian Peninsula. Yet mere maintenance of that standard is not enough. If it does not rise—and it has even fallen slightly since the inception of the Marshall Plan because our efforts to freeze wages and prices have been more successful with regard to the former than the latter—then all the political gains which democracy has made since the end of the civil war will be imperiled, and Greece will once again be faced with the danger of polarization between the advocates of Communist and of fascist dictatorship.

OUR operation in Greece has been successful in solving the most immediate problems facing that country. We have rescued it from a Communist triumph which, without our intervention, would surely have occurred. We have prevented the right from using our aid to entrench itself and destroy democracy in its own interest. But we have still not shown that awareness of the interaction between political and economic factors which the situation demands. We have demanded continual sacrifice from the Greek workers and peasants so that a larger portion of our aid might be devoted to a more rapid program of industrialization—though it was clear that such a program could never by itself solve the basic economic problem of Greece; and the Greek masses will scarcely feel very grateful for American economic aid unless it takes a form whose benefits they can immediately enjoy. We have spent ECA funds on the purchase of labor-saving machinery for a country in which labor is one of the few things always available in

superabundance, when we could have utilized these funds far more usefully to provide some amelioration of the workers' standard of living.

Moreover, while our policy when we had one has been considerably more apt to be good than bad, we have frequently been without one at crucial moments, and have even more frequently hesitated to press it in deference to a fetish of non-interference. (In this we have not been consistent; sometimes, while refusing to interfere on major questions of policy, we have simultaneously laid down the law on minor details of administration.) But since our presence in Greece obviously is interference, and has completely altered the previous balance of forces within the country, we have not been able to escape the responsibility for even those policies which we most vehemently disapproved. Everybody in Greece knows that we are in a position to impose our policy on any question if we are so inclined, hence it is generally assumed that we do. And since, with rare exceptions, we have carefully refrained from informing the Greek public of our stand on any question unless we had already reached an agreement with the government of the day, governments have found it very easy to shift the responsibility for unpopular acts—or more frequently failures to act—to our shoulders. This is all the more unfortunate in view of the fact that there has actually been a far higher degree of agreement, in most cases, between the American representatives in Greece and the ordinary people of that country than between either and most Greek governments.

In short, we have done a much better job in Greece than might have been expected, in view of our inexperience as a nation and lack of preparation of most of our representatives for the complexities of the Greek political and economic scene. But we have not as yet done anywhere near the job—particularly on the political side—that we must do if we are to maintain Greece as a strong and dependable ally in the struggle for a democratic world.

DISRAELI: THE CHOSEN OF HISTORY

Uniting the Old Jerusalem and the New

PHILIP RIEFF

GEORGE SAINTSBURY thought not only that Disraeli "founded a remarkable school of fiction," but that his politics were as romantic as his fiction. The most romantic thing in Disraeli was the motivation of both his fiction and his politics, a motivation to be found in his Jewishness—his quite particular kind of Jewishness. For it was not the Jews that claimed Disraeli—Disraeli claimed the Jews. Baptized into the Church of England in what would have been the year of his Bar Mitzvah, Disraeli *chose* not to forget he was a Jew. And it was not simply a reaction to the "hostile consciousness of others," as Sartre would interpret the sense of Jewishness. Rather the hostile consciousness of others was a reaction to his perverse claim to Jewishness.

The hostile consciousness of others can best be read in three unsigned articles, probably written by Goldwin Smith, the Liberal historian and polemicist, printed in consecutive numbers of the *Fortnightly Review* from April through June 1878. "The secret of Lord Beaconsfield's life," Smith wrote, "lies in his Jewish blood. . . . Lord Beaconsfield is the most remarkable illustration of his own doctrine of the ascendancy of Hebrew genius in modern Europe. . . . Certainly a century

For Benjamin Disraeli, one critic has remarked, England was the "Israel of his imagination." It might further be said that exactly because England was for Disraeli this imaginary Israel, he was able to create in English politics and letters a new tone, a new style of life, a new cast of mind—which, ironically enough, have since come to represent the "typically English." PHILIP RIEFF, who here explores the relation between Disraeli's myth of Israel (and of himself as one of the Chosen of History) and his quite substantial effects on English society, has taught social science at the College of the University of Chicago, and is now at work on a book dealing with the sociology of politics and culture in the 19th century. He was born in Chicago in 1922.

and a quarter of residence in England on the part of his ancestors and himself has left little trace on the mind and character of Lord Beaconsfield. He is in almost every essential . . . a Jew."

One of the missing essentials was that Disraeli was a member of the Established Church. And yet he played at being a Jew far more seriously than Heine played at not being a Jew. (To play at being a Jew is usually more serious.) Disraeli, who hated the universalist rationalism of his country, refused to be accepted as simply a "man," and yet he was certainly not simply a Jew. Sartre has developed no category for him, neither "authentic" nor "inauthentic." Disraeli neither fled from nor stayed with his Jewishness: he was pushed out too early to make either choice. But he remained a Jew in a peculiar way that deserves its own study—in his nostalgia.

The critic D. H. Harding has said that the word "nostalgia" ought not to be used "unless the quality of feeling to be described is recognizably similar to the common experience of homesickness, the feeling of distress for no localized, isolated cause, together with a feeling that one's environment is . . . vaguely wrong and unacceptable." Then the word is used quite properly to describe Disraeli. His writing is an expression of an experience recognizably similar to homesickness, and Disraeli certainly felt from the very beginning of his life to the end that his environment was vaguely wrong and unacceptable. His feeling of discomfort in his environment began at home, with his family.

DISRAELI's grandfather—Benjamin D'Israeli, merchant, for whom the grandchild was named—came to England from Italy around 1748, when he was eighteen. He joined the Jewish community in London, became a member of the Sephardic synagogue of Bevis Marks, and married a Jewish girl who never pardoned him his name. Her nag-

ging self-hatred in time drove him into retirement, but not before he had made a small fortune. Her only child, Isaac, suffered the burden of never being forgiven for being a little Jew. His existence, writes the second Benjamin in the *Memoir* of his father, "only served to swell the aggregate of many humiliating particulars. [He] was not to be to her a source of joy, or sympathy, or solace. She foresaw for her child only a future of degradation. . . ."

Isaac D'Israeli became a "timid, susceptible" boy, in his youth and early manhood suffering from what his son later decided must be called something other than a physical illness. He put it down, in his famous *Memoir*, as a "failing of nervous energy." Disraeli was amazed, that the best medical men for a long while diagnosed his father's illness as "consumption." "The symptoms," he writes, "are physical and moral . . . lassitude and despondency." He knew the case could not have been consumption, for he had had the same symptoms in his own early manhood. The disease was really self-hatred. "One of his few infirmities," Benjamin concludes of his father, "was . . . a deficiency of self-esteem."

DISRAELI remembered his grandmother, even in his later life, as "a demon," and the journeys to her home were the horrors of his boyhood. But he came to understand her very well. "My grandmother, the beautiful daughter of a family who had suffered much from persecution, had imbibed that dislike of her race which the vain are too apt to adopt when they find that they are born to public contempt. The indignant feeling that should be reserved for the persecutor, in the mortification of their disturbed sensibility, is too often visited on the victim and the cause of annoyance is recognized not in the ignorant malevolence of the powerful but in the conscientious conviction of the innocent sufferer."

His grandmother, he concluded, was "so mortified by her [Jewishness] that she lived till eighty without indulging in a tender expression." His father became an intellectual, the son of a rich Jew searching for mankind in libraries. He read Bayle and Voltaire, and especially Rousseau. When he had been a young boy he imagined his name was Emile,

not Isaac. He was too mild to break with the synagogue, or to marry other than a Jewess. His wife, Maria Basevi, took over the practical affairs of the family and bore him four sons, Benjamin, Raphael, Jacob, and Naph-tali, and a daughter, Sarah. Benjamin was born December 21, 1804, "or according to the Jewish reckoning the nineteenth of Tebet, 5565," as his chief biographer, Monypenny, puts it. "On the eighth day the boy was duly initiated into the covenant of Abraham, the rite of circumcision being performed by a relative of his mother's. . . ."

In 1817, when the grandfather died, Isaac agreed to have all his children baptized, and Benjamin was received into the Anglican communion at St. Andrew's Church, Holborn, July 31, 1817. Isaac had grasped at a petty reason to break with the synagogue. He gave it in an essay on "The Genius of Judaism": the "lone and sullen genius of rabbinical Judaism" cut him off "from the great family of mankind." Isaac D'Israeli spent the remainder of his life taking flight into the universal in his library, where he read and puttered all day and most evenings, and wrote such books as *Calamities of Authors*, which sold well to "the middling classes." But he himself did not become a Christian—that was no more "reasonable" than to remain a Jew. And the family name remained the same, D'Israeli. Indeed, D'Israeli had allowed the baptizing of his children only after considerable urging by a Gentile friend, the historian Sharon Turner, who convinced him that baptism would help their careers if not their souls. Civil office and much land and business were closed to Jews, not to be opened until Benjamin Disraeli himself helped do so.

THERE is no evidence that the twelve-year-old boy resisted baptism. Neither is there any sign that he welcomed it. Boys do not usually have opinions on such matters. What had happened was quite simple, and sudden—and, most of all, expedient. But the young Disraeli was certainly aware of his Jewishness. Until the year he was baptized, a man came every Saturday to the Christian school he attended and gave him Jewish religious instruction. When the rest of the boys made their daily prayer, Benjamin had to go to a corner and turn his back, as was the custom

developed at that time to take care of this sort of situation.

And there was always his name. Even after he had been received into the Church of England he had to fight his schoolmates to defend his name. The D'Israelis sent him to a Unitarian school, but even there he had to fight and they soon took him home. Benjamin stayed at home, alone, and read hard. The lonely boy decided he would be a famous man, and quickly. After all, Pitt had become prime minister at twenty-one, and Byron a star in Europe's culture at twenty-five. Young Benjamin made himself sick wondering what role to choose in order to be great.

Disraeli's father thought he ought to go into law; at seventeen he was articled to a firm of solicitors in Old Jewry. (A year later he dropped the apostrophe from the spelling of his name.) But he had already discovered another role, which he loved and which was to make him at least famous. He was writing a novel, *Vivian Grey*. And when it appeared it made him the literary lion of London, at twenty-one. *Vivian Grey*—and a period of deep depression—saved him from the law. Still, he could not decide what he was, or even *who* he was.

Troubled, he took his *Wanderjahre*, and returned home, irresolute. His depression drained him until he could not "write a line without effort." He wandered aimlessly about his father's house in "solitude and silence," unable to work enough to break the depression, but doing some reading and thinking. He worried about his appearance. "I grieve to say my hair grows very badly." Now his interest in dress became quite intense. He took to green velvet trousers, a canary-colored waistcoat, low shoes, silver buckles, lace at his wrists, and his hair in ringlets. He made himself into a complete dandy.

He lived "in perfect solitude for eighteen months." And he was "still suffering." It was the malaise his father had once suffered from, but Benjamin understood it better. In his letters, the word "ill" appears often in quotation marks. And his consequent reaction was quite different from his father's. What reading he did was in the history of the Jews. What thinking he did was of the Jews. Though every line was an effort, he began a second novel, to be called *Alroy*,

whose hero was a Jew. But he dropped this. He could not be heroic. He began another, *The Young Duke*. The young duke is young Disraeli, and both are quite despairing, even if their despair seems unfashionably Byronic now. "The drooping pen falls from my powerless hand, and I feel—keenly, I feel myself what indeed I am—far the most prostrate of a fallen race."

FINALLY, the son announced to his father what had been on his mind during the despair of all his solitudes and silences: he proposed to visit Jerusalem. This would be his cure. (Disraeli sent his heroes to Jerusalem to end their malaise.) His announcement was vetoed with all the cold calm his father could muster. Almost twenty years later, in his novel *Tancred, or The New Crusade*, Disraeli imagined how his father must have reacted to his announcement. "Why should Benjamin go to Jerusalem?" the father must have insisted to himself. "Unreasonable boy!" And if he reaches there what does he think he will find? Religious truth? Political justice? Let him read of Jerusalem in travel books for restless young gentlemen. "They tell us what it is, a third-rate city in a strange wilderness." Isaac thought it was a folly, and his wife, who was a practical woman, agreed.

But Benjamin found a way to go. Some wealthy friends, the Austens, financed the trip. And he got as his traveling companion the wealthy fiancé of his sister Sarah, William Meredith. They set out for Jerusalem in June 1830. His trip was an effort to get at himself by traveling back through his past to what he considered to be his beginning. The first important stop after England was Spain, land of the Sephardim. The next, Jaffa. He passed through Ramleh, and rode into Jerusalem in February 1831.

THE impact of Jerusalem upon him is recorded in his letters from that place to his sister Sarah; and, at a twenty years' remove, in *Tancred*.

Tancred, troubled young Lord Montacute, having always been fascinated by theology and troubled by the past, goes to find the mystery of that trouble in Palestine; it is his private crusade. If he is to go to the very beginning of his past, a learned Sephardi advises him, he must retrace his steps "from

Calvary to Sinai." When the pilgrim comes finally "within sight of Sinai" he is "brooding in dejection, his eyes . . . suffused with tears." Tancred is in a "reverie," the style, at least, if not the condition, in which Disraeli often expressed his own Jewishness—rather, his nostalgia for it. The pilgrim Tancred stands at Sinai. "It was one of those moments of amiable weakness which make us all akin, when sublime ambition, the mystical predispositions of genius, the solemn sense of duty . . . and the dogmas of . . . [religion and] philosophy alike . . . sink into nothingness. The voice of his mother sounded in his ear, and he was haunted by his father's anxious glance. Why was he there? Why was he, the child of a northern isle, in the heart of stony Arabia, far from the scene of his birth and of his duties?"

Disraeli calls it "an awful question." But he thinks he knows the answer he ought to assign to Tancred. The answer is in one of Disraeli's favorite parliamentary devices: the rhetorical question. Was he, then, a stranger there? Uncalled, unexpected, intrusive, unwelcome? Was it a morbid curiosity, or the proverbial restlessness of a sated aristocrat, that had drawn him to these wilds? What wilds? Had he no connection with them? Had he not from his infancy repeated in the congregation of his people the laws which, from the awful summit of these surrounding mountains, the Father of all had himself delivered for the government of mankind? And were not the wanderings of the Jews in the wilderness "the first and guiding history that had been entrusted to his young intelligence, from which it had drawn its first . . . conceptions?" Disraeli decides that Tancred is neither morbid tourist nor jaded young aristocrat. Tancred is here because he was here before he went to other lands. "Why, then, he had a right to be here! He had a connection with these regions; they had a hold upon him." He was not visiting a foreign land, like an educated and refined Hindu curious about Europe. He was visiting his own land, foreign as it was, "his fathers' land." Tancred's most passionate desire was "to penetrate the . . . elder world, and share its . . . divine prerogative. Tancred sighed."

Disraeli, who had written to John Murray that he might never return home, sighed and turned home. On their return trip, Meredith

died of smallpox. Sarah never married. Instead, she became her brother's devoted sister. Her brother needed all her devotion. Having failed to find himself in journalism (at twenty-one, he had been important in pushing John Murray to publish a rival to the *Times*) or in novels, Disraeli finally decided on politics—this, while he was still in Jerusalem. He returned to England "in famous condition—better indeed than I ever was in my life and full of hope and courage."

DISRAELI was twenty-eight when he returned to England. He was a famous novelist, and a bad poet. Most of all, he was a young man of letters with a public, and this had given him a precarious professional income, and an annoying habit of picking up large debts. But his sense of failure was still with him. A sense of failure, and something else, had driven Disraeli to Jerusalem. But Jerusalem, at this point, was a dream, and he knew he could have waking greatness only in action—on another blessed plot, that New Israel, this England.

Disraeli's position in English society in 1832, when he first stood for Parliament, was that of an intellectual, a dandy, an exotic. His novels had made him important to a society that, after all, did read novels. And his dandyism had made him even more ingratiating to a world that was, after all, a world of fashion. But the relation of the dandy to high society was that of a pacesetter of fashion who was also an outsider. The dandy might well be an aristocrat born, but if, like Disraeli, he was not one, he was never quite accepted—nor quite rejected.

"To enter high society, a man must have either blood, millions, or a genius." Disraeli thought he had at least genius. And he was in a hurry. He sought out the great with a purpose: to be great with them. They represented action and power. There was only one aristocracy above the English—the Jews', the universal, eternal aristocracy.

Disraeli used dandyism to legitimate his exoticism, which was his Jewishness. His dandyism merged with his Jewishness. This was the image the public had of him all his life, or at least until he became Lord Beaconsfield. The combination, Jew-dandy, gave him a name as a *farceur*, and he remains forever the Jew at play, overdressed and tongue

in cheek, piping a cynical tune. Nothing about him was assumed to be true—except his Jewishness.

THE diarist Wilfred Blunt decided Disraeli's Jewishness was the only real thing about him: "Aesthetically our good Jew was a terrible Philistine; and politically . . . a very complete *farceur*. I don't like to call him anything worse than that. . . . Only you cannot persuade me that he even for an instant took himself seriously as a British statesman, or expected any . . . to accept him so. His *Semitic* principles of course were genuine enough. For his fearlessness in avowing these I hold him in esteem—for a Jew ought to be a Jew. . . . [But] the wonder is that anyone should have been found to take him seriously . . . after such beginnings as his had been."

Disraeli's exaggerated Jewishness was a pleasure, a revenge, a resource. It was the center of his strength. Disraeli, wrote Emma Lazarus, had inherited and cultivated the pose of the Jew, "the simulated patience to submit to [humiliation, defeat, and brutality] without flinching, while straining every nerve and directing every energy to the aim of retaliation and revenge." Emma Lazarus thought Disraeli shared with Shylock, as a representative Jew of the Diaspora, "the rebellion of a proud heart embittered and perverted by brutal humiliations, and the consequent thirst for revenge, the astuteness, the sarcasm, the pathos, the egotism, and the cunning of the Hebrew usurer." As in Shylock, she found in Disraeli "the poetic, Oriental imagination dealing in tropes and symbols, the energy, or rather now the obstinacy, of will, the intellectual superiority, the peculiarly Jewish strength . . . not only to perceive and make the most of every advantage of their situation and temperament, but also, with marvelous adroitness, to transform their very disabilities into new instruments of power."

Disraeli's pose gave him his perfect grip on himself. But the price of a perfect pose is to be unknown, alone, and this was the rock-bottom price he had to pay for power. An outsider—an intellectual of sorts, a Jew of sorts—cannot let the insiders get too close to him. It would only deepen their suspicion or, at least, their confusion about him. And

confusion is the same thing as suspicion in politics.

Disraeli was an opportunist. This did not strike him as being unethical, only political. He made no bones about his opportunism. After silence, it was the highest law of politics. If he was unfair to Peel in the famous debates in which he destroyed his party leader and opened the way to make over the Tories under his own leadership, he was unfair with a clear eye that this was his main, perhaps his only, chance. Politics is a game of time. And times change. Peel knew that, too. But Disraeli knew it better. When Peel attempted to change the Tory protectionist policy, Disraeli rose to defend it. It was his chance to separate the Tories from their leader, and he made the most of it. He became the leader the protectionists had to accept, finally. No one else could speak so well for them.

BUT this was later, after Disraeli had been elected to the House. His first stand, in 1832, failed. He was too suspect. Neither party took him seriously. Opinion had it that he was a Radical. Disraeli failed as well in his second stand, and in his third, and in his fourth. By this time he had decided to be a Tory. Failure makes conservatives out of near-radicals.

The Conservative party was in a quandary when Disraeli entered it; "having rejected all respect for antiquity, it offers no redress for the present, and makes no preparation for the future." Disraeli gave English Conservatism in the 19th century its program and its purpose. To prepare for the future, a political movement must return to its past. So Disraeli believed all his life; he was a dynamic conservative. And the conception of a return to the past organized his own energies, if it did not supply them.

Disraeli's "active and real ambition" was to be a great man, even prime minister of Victoria's England. As his fiction was in some measure a nostalgia for his Jewishness, so his political ideology was founded on nostalgia for a past that Britain, like himself, perhaps, had never had.

Disraeli made the return to the past the guiding principle of his politics. The program of "Young England"—the label of his ideas before they acquired the later label

"Imperialism"—was avowedly old: "To change back the oligarchy into a generous aristocracy round a real throne; to infuse life and vigor into the Church, as the trainer of the nation . . . to establish a commercial code [this is the age of child-labor capitalism] . . . to elevate the physical as well as the moral condition of the people, by establishing that labor required regulation [e.g. protection] as much as property; and all this by the use of ancient forms and the restoration of the past rather than by political revolutions founded on abstract ideas."

This is how Disraeli viewed his political religion, from the perspective of the general preface to the 1870 edition of his novels. The return to the past—the program of Young England—was at once the expression and the distortion of his nostalgia for his lost Jewishness. Disraeli wanted to unite the aristocracy and the masses against the Whig oligarchy and the upper middle classes. He viewed the crown and the aristocracy as the protectors of the people, with the Established Church as the propaganda department—the praying section—of the state. In turn, legislation had to be careful not to cut the basis of power out from under the aristocracy. Disraeli well understood that property was power in his time: he became a corn protectionist to keep it so. What was needed was a hierarchy with sensibility, and with a sense of *noblesse oblige*; "an aristocracy that leads . . . since Aristocracy is a fact." But that Democracy—the mass age—was coming was equally a fact. Then let it be led by that older, and higher, fact—Aristocracy. In any case, this was good politics for aristocratic parties.

The industrialists and the commercial oligarchy must be rapacious in business, and so must be irresponsible in government. The Whigs cannot care for the people. Rather, they have divided England into two nations, the rich and the poor. By the *coup* of 1832, the Whigs had finally set up the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. "To acquire, to accumulate, to plunder . . . to propose a Utopia to consist of *Wealth and Toil*, this has been the breathless business of enfranchised England for the last twelve years [since 1832] until we are startled from our voracious strife by the wail of intolerable serfage." The Whigs, according to Disraeli, had made modern history the ugly history of class struggle. But it

need not be that way. A dedicated elite could change modern history. Capitalism, which is Whiggery to Disraeli, has divorced the idea of property and power from the idea of duty, and thus has divorced power from responsibility. But in the English past, responsibility was joined with power. The connecting link was a dedicated elite. Dedication is, after all, the price an elite ought to pay for its power and for its property.

Chartism was the first answer of the English masses to industrial capitalism. Among the politicians of the time, Disraeli alone was not afraid to hear it. He almost welcomed it. He thought the alliance of the true gentlemen and the good people was perhaps just around the corner. Let the sheep and the shepherds together stand off the wolves. This was Disraeli's program, and he tried to educate the Tory party to it. He was a first-rate teacher, but somehow the lessons failed to get across. His pupils were inclined to another tactic: to domesticate the wolves, who seemed to them much more manly than Disraeli. The Whigs, after all, were of the gentry. So the Tories refused to become Disraeli's gentlemen: they suspected that Disraeli did not know, really, what a gentleman was. He never belonged at Brooks's. And if he belonged at the Carlton—in fact to become enshrined there—he had to mount a great deal of pressure to get in. Even his friend Bentinck did not think he was a sportsman. Certainly, Disraeli knew little about horses.

But he knew more and cared more about politics. It was almost all of his life. Politics made his life successful, he thought. And he played politics everywhere, even where there was no politics. Disraeli was a completely political man. After race, all was politics.

As a political man with the common touch, Disraeli knew, before most of his contemporaries, the value of Public Opinion. He called it the "cry," and he always knew how to "play with a cry," as he put it. The novelist turned politician was an early modern master of mass manipulation, and the first modern politician to assert the supremacy of his art. He used the press, then the most powerful means of mass manipulation, as no other politician before him. And he was proud of his craft. "I am a Knight of the

Press," he once said, "and have no other escutcheon." This was rare in an age when politics still demanded escutcheons of a more biological, or, at least, economic, sort.

Disraeli discovered how to manage that new political integer, the People. One got along with the People in the same way one must get along with women—say, Queen Victoria. The trick, of course, is to flatter them; in fact, "to lay it on with a trowel." They will know it is flattery, but will love it anyway. Disraeli's best advice to politicians was always: "Talk to women. Talk to women as much as you can. This is the best school. This is the way to gain fluency, because you need not care what you say, and had better not be sensible."

If Disraeli gave Conservatism a grip on the public, he equally made Conservatism legitimate for the intellectuals, who are always anti-public. The point is clearer when American Toryism is compared with the British variety. As Crane Brinton has said, American Toryism is "dull and stuffy, singularly lacking in intellectual graces." Robert Taft is not quite bright enough to attract the bright young people, and Catholicism, in America, is still Irish. Disraeli gave English Toryism grace. He added books to good tobacco, drawings, and the University, even though he himself did not smoke and had not attended a university. Disraeli made politics respectable for young gentlemen, semi-skilled intellectuals, and old ladies who love literature. The image of the literate Conservative is Disraeli's work, after Burke.

The man who remade Conservative politics almost failed to become a politician. The cry "Shylock!" rose to meet him as he rose to speak. The public was put off by his "physiognomy," which seemed to them "strictly Jewish." If it was not "Shylock!" the alternative greeting was "old clothes!" And some of his opponents declared to their audiences, in asides, that they could not "pronounce his name aright."

Disraeli did not complain. He could not. In any case, he had already formulated the ruling motto of his life: "Never complain, never explain." Rather, he returned insult for insult. He gained a reputation for being a very insulting young man. Later, when he was older, his reputation was as a mysterious reservoir of cynical truculence. Aristocratic

ladies, in their memoirs, list as one of their constant fears that they would come under Disraeli's wrath.

After four tries, Disraeli was elected to the House of Commons from Maidstone in 1837. He stayed forty years. But the first speech of perhaps the greatest parliamentary orator of the 19th century ended as a humiliating farce. The hostile members met him with hoots and catcalls. It was the laughter, however, that brought him down to his seat, his speech unfinished. But his final words were a taunt he was to make good: "I sit down, but the time will come when you will hear from me."

MUCH of what England heard from Disraeli is outside the limits of this essay. Its task is rather to follow the voice to its origins, that is, to Disraeli as Jew.

On the surface, Disraeli seemed never to be disturbed by anything. This—and his talent for dramatic silences—was the mask that so infuriated Gladstone while it charmed England's salons. It was also the mask that gave face to the myth of the Jew Satanas, the "superlative Hebrew conjuror" who led poor old England by its nose.

"Someone wrote to me yesterday," Lord Acton said in a letter to Gladstone's daughter Mary, "that no Jew for 1800 years has played so great a part in the world. That would be no Jew since St. Paul; and it is very startling. But, putting aside literature . . . I have not yet found an answer." And further: "Let us . . . call him the greatest Jewish minister since Joseph."

Consciousness of Disraeli as a Jew appears in all English writing of the period and later. His biographers and the political writers of his day cannot shake their awareness of "that Oriental tendency in his nature." And they are made uncomfortable by his defiant outbursts of racial scorn for the "barbarians," who, of course, were the Gentiles, the "flat-nosed Franks" who worship a Jew, and "who toil and study, and invent theories to account for their own incompetence." The only "barbarians" Disraeli excepted from his scorn were the ancient Greeks. Nevertheless, his advice to students of civilization is: study the Jews. In the Jews, and in the Jews alone, can the exhausted Gentiles "discover new courses of emotion, new modes of expression,

new trains of ideas, new principles of invention, and new bursts of fancy."

It was the impressive, death's-head face, which *Punch* saw as the sphinx or, at least, as the face of old Jewry, that exasperated Carlyle to ask how long "this Jew would be allowed to dance on the belly of [England]." Disraeli's face fascinated—and still fascinates—Englishmen. It seems to them to express the witty, ironic, dancing character of the Jew. It was not simply his dandyism. The upper classes knew and included many dandies. Rather, it was his thin face; the "lividly pale" skin; the large "black eyes"; the long nose and heavy underlip; the jet black hair, curling near the big ears; and, finally, the stoop of a thin body. It was the face and stoop of Irving's Shylock, so popular that it has been the classic portrayal of the role from that time to this.

But the disturbing question of his Jewishness can best be read in the snatches of Disraeli's memoirs and in his novels. In his novels, particularly, Disraeli lifted "the veil that hides his own personality," and opened up the "hidden motives" so deep underneath his "public pretenses," as he says of the partly autobiographical character Sidonia (who is also Lionel Rothschild) in his finest novel, *Coningsby*.

One of the more significant accounts of his secret life is in his *Memoir* of his father, written as an introduction to a three-volume edition of Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*. Most revealing is his fantasy about his name. He simply decided that his name came to be Disraeli because his ancestors "assumed the name . . . in order that their race might be forever recognized." Thus they would be forever D'Israeli—of Israel. Disraeli invented a romance by which his name became a deliberate emblem of dignity, a badge of pride, an irrevocable identity, a "we" to the world's "they." There are elements of his "ideal ambition"—of his Jewish fantasy life—in each of his novels. It is especially obtrusive in the rhapsodic *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy*. He writes in his *Diary*: "My works are the embodiment of my feelings. In *Vivian Grey* I have portrayed my active and real ambition: in *Alroy* my ideal ambition . . . [it] is the secret history of my feelings." In another place, Disraeli further

explains his purpose in *Alroy*: "It is meant to be the celebration of a gorgeous incident in the annals of that sacred and romantic people from whom I derive my blood and name."

Disraeli published *Alroy* soon after his return from Jerusalem. It was never one of his popular novels. The critical public judged it absurd where not unreadable. But it provoked a reaction reserved for creations less absurd than annoying. A number of parodies of Disraeli's rhapsodic attempt appeared. One opened: "O reader dear! do pray look here, and you will spy the curly hair and forehead-fair, and nose so high and gleaming eye of Benjamin Dis-ra-e-li, the wondrous boy who wrote *Alroy*, in rhyme and prose, only to show, how long ago victorious Judah's lion-banner rose. . . ." But the most furious critical baiting was done by "Thomas Ingoldsby," a famous pseudonym of the magazine world of the time. "Thomas Ingoldsby," the Reverend R. H. Barham, published a parody of *Alroy* in *Blackwood's* in 1832, calling it: *The Wondrous Tale of Ikey Solomons*—Ikey Solomons was a notorious receiver of stolen goods.

ALROY is a story of the Jews of the Diaspora. David Alroy is a "Prince of the Captivity," full of Byron and brooding on the degradation of the Jews. Alroy, of the princely people, is sick—to the Byronic verge of action—of the slavery of the chosen: "God of my fathers! For indeed I dare not style thee God of their wretched sons. . . . Thy servant Israel, Lord, is born a slave so infamous, so woebegone, and so contemned, that even when our fathers hung their harps by the sad waters . . . why it was paradise compared with that we suffer."

Alroy refuses to suffer. He prefers to lead the Jews back to power, to national identity. Disraeli sets Alroy in a number of characteristically revealing conversations. One of these is with an ex-Jew who has risen to power in the Gentile world. Alroy argues the problem of commitment with the ex-Jew, now high in government service.

"After all," Alroy insists, "thou art a [Gentile]."

"No," the ex-Jew, called Lord Honain, answers.

"What then?"

"I have told you, a man." Honain asserts

he is neither Jew nor Gentile, and that most of all it is foolish to belong to a frail minority. It is better to belong to the strong majority; there is power, there is chosenness. Alroy has only one answer. Power is not the predicate of chosenness, but chosenness of power.

"We are the chosen people."

"Chosen for scoffs, and scorns, and contumelies. Commend me such a choice," Honain answers.

Alroy stubbornly commends the choice to him. Further, he insists to the ex-Jew that he cannot now understand the Jews. Honain is too well off, too strong, and so he cannot understand why the Jews must fight for power. The fight for power is clearest to those who are powerless but superior: the Jews.

"The world goes well with thee, my Lord Honain. But if, instead of bows and blessings, thou like my brethren, wert greeted only with cuff and curse; if thou didst rise each morning only to feel existence a dishonour, and to find thyself marked out among men as something foul and fatal; if it were thy lot, like theirs, at best to drag on a mean and dull career, hopeless and aimless, or with no other hope or aim but that which is degrading, and all this too with a keen sense of thy intrinsic worth, and a deep conviction of superior race; why, then perchance, [you] might discover 'twere worth a struggle to be free and honoured."

Alroy's brooding discomfort, and the guilt he feels at his inaction, is ended when he kills a Moslem who has tried to violate his sister, Miriam. He flees into the hills, to the retreat of the militant rabbi Jabaster, who is his ideologue. The rabbi instructs him in his mission: to raise the Jews first to revolt and then to independence. But first, Alroy must make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The fantasy at the "Tomb of the Kings" in Jerusalem is the most remarkable in the pattern of fantasies in Disraelian fiction. Solomon incarnate appears and hands down to his descendant, David Alroy, the rod of leadership. David returns to raise the revolt. With Jabaster as his chaplain, he leads the Jews to triumph. Alroy is, indeed, a Prince. But power, of course, corrupts him. He wants to be Alexander instead of David.

"The world is mine: and shall I yield the prize, the universal and heroic prize to realize

the dull tradition of some dreaming priest and consecrate a legend? . . . Is the Lord of Hosts so slight a God, that we must place a barrier to His sovereignty, and fix the boundaries of Omnipotence between the Jordan and the Lebanon? . . . Universal empire must not be founded on sectarian prejudices and exclusive rights."

SEeking power for his people, Alroy had become intoxicated with it for himself. The Prince of the Captivity was corrupted by the vision of power in a Gentile world. He marries a Gentile, the daughter of the Caliph, and makes Baghdad his capital. When it becomes apparent that he has abandoned his Jewish ambitions for other pleasures, Jabaster leads the Jews in revolt against him. This gives Alroy's wife the opportunity she has wanted to eliminate Jabaster, who is beheaded at her insistence. Finally, the Moslems defeat Alroy, and he is sentenced to death by the restored Sultanate. However, he is offered his freedom if he will renounce his Jewishness. This last irony amuses him. His refusal to renounce religiously what he had already renounced politically is his near-final affirmation of Jewishness.

But his final affirmation is more positive. Failure has taught him more about his Jewishness than success. What had been fatal, for him, Alroy now understands, was his attempt to de-Judaize himself. He makes what he considers to be a historical analogy: "The policy of the son of Kanesh—'twas fatal. He preferred Egypt to Judah, and he suffered." Alroy is a convinced Jew now, even more than he was when he was an ambitious Jew. His ambition is now for the Jews. In the same speech, he continues: "Sires, the Lord has blessed Judah; it is His land. He would have it filled by His peculiar people. . . . For this He has by many curious rites and customs marked us out from all other nations, so that we cannot at the same time mingle with them and yet be to Him." Alroy comes to what proves to be the final conclusion of his life: "We must exist alone." The Jews are meant to "preserve this loneliness." Loneliness is "the great and holy essence of our law."

The other side of the Jews' historic loneliness is Zionism. Alroy comes to understand this in what is perhaps one of the earliest

Zionist perorations given in Western literature. He is asked what he wishes for the Jews:

"You ask me what I wish? My answer is: a National existence, which we have not. You ask me what I wish? my answer is: the Land of Promise. You ask me what I wish? my answer is: Jerusalem—all we have forfeited, all we have yearned after, all for which we have fought—our beauteous country, our holy creed, our simple manners."

But Alroy is troubled by the thought again, that the Return may be the Jews' last illusion. "Is there no hope?" he asks himself. His answer is to quote the Prophets, that religious hope exists most of all in the hopeless situation: "The bricks are fallen, but we will rebuild with marble; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars. . . . Yet again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O . . . Israel!"

ALROY is a confession. It is an assertion that the Jew is the clue to history, and its demiurge. But the most passionate statement of Disraeli's fantasy of Jewish chosenness is made by his most romantic character, the Jew Sidonia in the novel *Coningsby*. Sidonia is Disraeli's affirmation of the myth of the super-Jew, superior because a Jew. Disraeli insists: "Race is everything; there is no other truth." Sidonia is proudest that he is "pure" Sephardic—for him, the Sephardim are the purest Jews. Sidonia is Disraeli, although he is made to look like Lionel Nathan Rothschild, who was to become the first man to enter the English Parliament as a Jew; that is, without having to take his seat "on the oath as a Christian." Guedalla calls Sidonia, in a try at a joke, "Disrothschild."

As Disraeli's proudest projection, Sidonia is the most powerful, the most learned, the most shadowy man in the world. He is also the loneliest. Sidonia is an alien, detached, without intimates or a permanent home. It is his homelessness that makes him intensely interested in the problem of political and cultural stability.

Disraeli offers in Sidonia a character who has the insight of an outsider. But his insight and his power are pathetic—for they must be the insight and the power given to an outsider who can never quite use his superiority to bring him into a community. His power

and insight are the masks, the weapons, of his detachment. Sidonia "was admired by women, idolized by artists, received in all circles . . . and appreciated for his intellect by the very few to whom he at all opened himself; for though affable and generous, it was impossible to penetrate him; though unreserved in his manners, his frankness was limited to the surface. He observed everything, thought ever, but avoided serious discussion. . . . He looked on life with a glance rather of curiosity than contempt. His religion walled him out. . . . He perceived himself a lone being. . . ."

This is the image Disraeli accepted for his own self: walled out, a lone being. But Sidonia chooses to remain walled out and to turn his loneliness and exclusion into a premise of insight. Disraeli turned his own loneliness into both a pride and a political tactic. Yet the lonely, proud man titillated himself with the fancy that English Jewry found a secret, private joy in him, whispering among themselves that "he is one of us." The Jewish hero, walled out from the Jews as well as from the Gentiles, nevertheless is aware of his irrevocable connection with the Jews.

DISRAELI, in his fantasy, saw in the Jew the demiurge, as well as the measure, of history. Sidonia expresses this: "The fact is you cannot destroy [us]. It is a . . . fact, a simple law of nature, which has baffled Egyptian and Assyrian kings, Roman emperors and Christian inquisitors. No penal laws, no physical tortures can effect that a superior race should be absorbed in an inferior, or be destroyed by it. . . ."

Sidonia insists that the Jews are not only the super-race, but now and always responsible for whatever is great and good in history, despite the attempt of their inferiors to degrade and to destroy them. The Jews, according to Sidonia, are superior by more than force of intellect. The Jews are favored with genius by nature, as a divine gift. Try as the Gentiles might to destroy them, the Jews are indestructible. They are the intermediaries between man and God, the divine "link" that gives to mankind its humanity, the priestly people in a world that would be best organized as a theocracy.

Disraeli avowed Sidonia's manifesto for his own in the famous twenty-fourth chapter

of his political biography of his friend Lord George Bentinck, which repeats many of the same things. This chapter, quite out of place in the story of Bentinck's life, is a wholesale defense of the Jews, past, present, and future, and an unqualified assertion of their superiority over other "races." Disraeli's belief in the Jew as the indestructible hero of history led him to claim for the Jews every historical glory of Western civilization. Christianity, at its best, is a Jewish religion, and what is not best in it is not Jewish. He could not allow many pages to pass before he must repeat one of his favorite taunts: that, after all, the Gentiles worship a Jew and a Jewess. This is also the taunt of his beloved heroine, the Jewess Eva in *Tancred*. The taunt was meant as a challenge delivered by Disraeli in his own name to the Gentile world.

The Jew is chosen for eternity, Disraeli proclaims in the same chapter of his *Life of Bentinck*. He does not know too much of Jewish theology or history—or of Christian theology or history, for that matter. For Disraeli, these are all lumped together as the "great Asian mystery." But knowledge, he thinks, is not so necessary to insight as faith. Neither as prime minister nor as a proto-Zionist did Disraeli allow lack of information to inhibit his certainty. He is sure that the Jews, "sustained by a sublime religion," are the chosen of the earth. Each Jew proves his chosenness. Opportunity makes him the Tory prime minister of Great Britain. Persecution makes him a revolutionary leader in Europe. It does not matter what the world does to Jewry, Jewry always gives proof of its chosenness.

BUT Disraeli has still to answer a taunt returned to his own taunts: that he, D'Israeli of Israel, was a convert to Christianity. Disraeli gave a Jewish answer to an impossible question. *He the convert? A converted Jew?* It is the Gentiles who are the converts, he answers. And that is something that in their confusion about the real nature of Christianity they quite forget. The answer is, admittedly, not equal to the question; but it has its cogency.

To Jews who thought themselves "better" converted, Disraeli showed an icy humor. He saved some of his sharpest irony for those "young ladies" who are "ashamed of their

race, and not fanatically devoted to their religion, which might be true, but certainly was not fashionable." And he directed what he hoped were his most telling thrusts at the most sophisticated, and so the most vicious, type of assimilationist. This was the "animated" creature who "was always combatting prejudice" and who "felt persuaded that the Jews would not be so much disliked if they were better known." All they had to do, Disraeli minced, "was to imitate as closely as possible the habits and customs of the nation among whom they chanced to live. . . ."

Like many more modern Jewish intellectuals, Disraeli wrote partly to protect himself against the completest assimilation: the loss of his own consciousness as a Jew. Assimilated before he could choose another way, he hated assimilation. A master of practiced nonchalance all his life, he could barely tolerate the "practiced nonchalance" of the assimilationist ladies of his time. He expected a good woman to be "enthusiastic for her race" and unashamed, at least, of her religion. The first requirement for the role of heroine in his novels is that the lady be loyal to her "old faith," whatever that "old faith" be. This accounts for the affection he displays in his novels for noble old Catholic families, and for loyal young Catholic ladies.

But the Catholic heroine is simply a variation of the Jewish; of Eva, in *Tancred*, and of Miriam, the sister of Alroy. Catholicism, as a loyalty, appeals to him because it is a loyalty in the midst of disloyalties. The Jews are alone in the world as the Catholics are alone in Protestant England. Loyalty is the one characteristic a Jew cannot give up and still remain a Jew. The test of loyalty is to continue to live separately, no matter what the temptations of victory or defeat. "The Hebrews have never blended with their conquerors," says Eva to Tancred, proudly. In his novels, the heroine is the vessel of loyalty—a quality that makes his good women altogether flat, always superior and virtuous. Miriam is a better Jew than her brother, the great David Alroy; Disraeli dedicated *Alroy* to his sister, Sarah.

FINALLY, Disraeli made the Jew the image of what he thought to be his own politics. The Jews, he decided, "represent the Semitic principle; all that is spiritual in our nature.

They are the trustees of tradition, and the conservators of the religious element. They are a living and most striking evidence of the falsity of that pernicious doctrine of modern times, the natural equality of man." The Jews are the "natural aristocrats" of man. Disraeli's entire "education" of the Tories was to recall them to the responsibility of their aristocracy, as trustees of the English political tradition. And his image of the English aristocrat was struck off from the image of the Jew. Disraeli insisted that the dynamic of English culture was its Hebraism. "Vast as the obligations of the whole human family are to the Hebrew race, there is no portion . . . so much indebted to them as the British people. It was the sword of the Lord and of Gideon that won the boasted liberties of England; chanting the same canticles that cheered the heart of Judah amid their glens, the Scotch, upon their hillsides, achieved their religious freedom. [And] who is the most popular poet in this country? Is he to be found among the Mr. Wordsworths and the Lord Byrons . . .? No; the most popular poet in England is the sweet singer of Israel. . . . There never was a race who sang so often the odes of David as the people of Great Britain."

Disraeli's sense of the past made him a consistent advocate of aristocracy as the decisive basis of English politics, and of the Jews as the aristocracy of history. In *Tancred*, he calls the Gentile world sordid, and he makes Sidonia dismiss Gentile Christianity as an immature imitation of the peoples with a master past. The past and the present, as Sidonia says, "explain each other." The Christian clergy knows "nothing about these things. How can they? A few centuries back they were tattooed savages. . . ." Politics and the-

ology, Sidonia concludes, are not yet within the mastery of Christian civilization. They require "an apprenticeship of some thousand years at least; to say nothing of clime and race."

DISRAELI was often sentimental and could move himself to tears by his own words. But his sentimentalism was the hardest thing inside him. Sentimentalism, in the form of nostalgia, defines his politics and his fiction. It represents his sense of the past, and of his chosenness in it. It gives him his ideology, and has had a hand in shaping British political rhetoric, and Zionist rhetoric since then. (Churchill's epigrammatic, nationalist sentimentalism is straight from Disraeli, not from Gibbon, as some students of Churchill's rhetoric think. Gibbon was neither a sentimentalist nor a nationalist.) Disraeli felt himself twice chosen, as a Jew and as an Englishman, a representative of the Old Jerusalem and the New, the past and the present united.

Disraeli was pleased to make his sense of chosenness the basis of his politics throughout his life. His belief in the mystery of Israel's chosenness gave him a basis for his belief in his own chosenness in English politics. It gave him the necessary aggressive mystique he needed to survive in English politics, a unique achievement for a man in his position, unrepeatable in England since. Disraeli did not simply hint at the doctrine of election, he asserted it. And his prophecy to England was a romantic conservative vision, like Cromwell's, of England, that blessed plot, as a New Israel. It was Disraeli's nostalgia for his Jewishness that enabled him to present this vision in English political history.

A WARSAW FIGHTER IN ISRAEL

A Visit with Antek

ZELDA POPKIN

SINCE 1914, when I first went to work on a daily newspaper, I have done innumerable interviews. The strangest of them all was that one recently on the Samaritan plain in Western Galilee, at a kibbutz called Lochamei Hagot'ot, which means "fighters of the ghettos." It was with a man who was known as Antek in the Warsaw ghetto.

He is the original of Itshak Katz, the Hashomer man, in John Hersey's novel *The Wall*. Actually, the living man's name is Itshak too, Itshak Zuckerman. He is thirty-five now. In 1943, when the battle of the ghetto took place, he was in his twenties, a youth, but seasoned in underground conspiracy and in the cunning of unequal battle. I went to see him to try to find out what becomes of a hero when he has settled down.

An appointment had been made for me by the Public Information Office in Tel Aviv and he was waiting for me in the doorway of a small, one-story, red-roofed, white cement house. He came forward, hand extended. He was tall, lean, and sunburned. He had bushy fair hair and a short, scraggly blond mustache. His eyes were light blue, unusually large, brilliant and intense. He wore khaki

IN ISRAEL cabinets fall, bread is scarce and butter non-existent, and the buses most distinctly don't run on time. But one great and overriding fact remains—to the vast majority of the lost and defeated who survived Hitler, this land gave haven and a home. ZELDA POPKIN did not write this moving story of one defeated latter-day Maccabee and what Israel meant to him as a historical reminder, but such reminders of Jewish struggle and heroism are always appropriate, and especially for this Chanukah season. Mrs. Popkin's most recent novel, *Quiet Street*, a story of the siege of Jerusalem, was published last year by Lippincott.

slacks and a neat gray pullover sweater. He looked like a Midwestern farmer.

We shook hands. He led the way through the little house to a large room and sat down behind a desk. His manner seemed both curious and shy. He waited for me to speak first.

We had to select a mutual language. We decided on Yiddish. That is a chameleon tongue. It takes on the colorations of the country in which it was learned. My Yiddish had its mixture of English and Antek's of Polish. Our dialogue went haltingly. Often we had to pause to interpret ourselves. Joe Davis, the former New Zealand newspaperman who was conducting me, knew no Yiddish. He tried to help out with Hebrew.

JOE had said when we were driving down from the Galilee hills that this place gave him the creeps. Yet in the spring forenoon it seemed pleasant enough. The room was large, airy, and flooded with sun. Simple cream-colored draperies of hand-woven cloth hung at the windows. The desk and chairs were modern, of light woods and chrome tubing. On a shelf a polished silver menorah reflected the light. Photographs ran in a row around the whitewashed walls. There were low glass cases and a tall cylinder, plastered with papers of yellow, pink, green.

I decided to begin with the room where we were. "This is an attractive room," I said.

"This is our museum," Antek replied. "Here is our history."

"I want your personal history," I said.

He looked down the bare desk top. After a moment he mumbled, "I do not know where to begin."

"Begin with Warsaw. When did you leave Warsaw?"

"In 1947."

I thought I had not understood: 1947 was long after the ghetto was razed, two years after the war was over. "But where did you stay all those years?"

His reply was evasively curt. "With friends."

There was silence again. I tried a new approach. "What did you do before the Nazis came into Warsaw? What was your profession, your trade?"

"Profession? Trade?" His words came painfully. "The underground was my profession. That was all the profession I ever had."

"How old were you?"

"I am thirty-five now." He paused again, doing subtraction. "I was twenty-three when the war broke out."

"You were just a boy, very young for a leader."

Again the slow, flat, unemotional accents. "We were all young. The older men were afraid. They failed us. There were only the young." He halted. He waited for me.

I tried a new gambit. "How many of you are here?"

"Seven. There are only fifteen of us alive in the world. Seven of us are in this place. We came together and we decided to remain together, to make sure the world would never forget what happened to us. So we decided to build our kibbutz and to build our museum and gather together all that there was to tell our history. We came here on April nineteenth, two years ago." He was speaking more easily now.

"Which is now most important to you," I asked, "to preserve the past or to build a future?"

He wove his long fingers together and studied them. He got up slowly. "I should like to show you what happened to us," he said.

We walked to the whitewashed wall where the photographs were. "Here it starts," Antek said. "These are true photographs." He accented the word "true." It was a word he was to use often that day, the word the survivors of Dachau and Auschwitz most often employed back in 1945, when they tried to tell all that had happened to them. "It is true.

. . . It really happened. . . . It's true," as though they were certain we were convinced in advance these things had never happened, could never happen, to people like us.

"These were found on the Nazi commandant of Warsaw when he was captured," Antek said. "The Nazis were methodical people. They made pictures of everything."

GRUESOME and graphic, the historic drama unfolded in black and white: first the ghetto intact, the substantial 19th-century houses and shops, the well-dressed residents in the streets; then the laying of the first bricks for the wall and the streets stretching empty and desolate; after that, houses in flames and people in panic, running; then other photographs of people, hands over head after being rounded up, and one of a fear-frozen man being dragged from the cavern where he had hid. Around one wall and half of another, the mordant frieze ran. It ended when the ghetto's drama was finished, with charred rubble heaps.

The day outside had been hot; I felt chilled to the bone.

Antek walked beside me and stood beside me, without saying a word. He stared at the photographs as though to him, too, they were new. When I had reached the last, he turned and veered toward the cases. "This mandolin." He lifted it out, fingered it almost indifferently. "They made it there." It was of metal, tin cans possibly, and its head was the parchment of a torn Holy Scroll. He put it back, his mustache closing over tightened lips. "There are our letters," he said. "What people wrote to relatives and to friends." He bit off his words. "And our identity cards. Our yellow badges. All the things of our life. We have collected everything." Then he led the way to the tall cylinder plastered with papers. "Our instructions are here."

He had a way of just half raising his arm, never actually pointing, merely indicating where I might look if I chose. There was no urgency in his manner. It was as if, had I been bored, he could have endured even that. The bright papers were handbills in German, instructions where to report, orders

to turn in precious metals, gold and silver jewelry, and what meager rations to draw.

I returned to the desk. Antek followed me there. I sat down again. "Now let us talk about you," I said.

THERE was a half minute of silence before Antek shrugged and shook his head. "I will bring you our archivist," he replied. "Doctor Karmisch," he called out.

A man bustled in promptly, as though he had had his ear to the door, awaiting summons. Despite the prefatory denial in *The Wall*, there was and there is an archivist of the battle for the Warsaw ghetto. The counterpart of Hersey's Noach is a lively, merry-eyed, smallish man. He seemed eager to talk, yet like Antek he spoke of no personal matters, merely telling me, in a quick, passing response to my direct question, that in the ghetto, before the disaster, he had been a minor civil servant, and then turning back to the museum. Had I seen everything here? Then come to the other room. There were other things.

The small anteroom through which we had followed Antek when we arrived turned out to be a library and a memorial gallery. It was hung with photographs and framed manuscripts, the letters, poems, plays of Itzhak Katzenelson, poet of the ghetto, who had been deported and had died with the rest of Jewish Warsaw. At one side of the small crowded room were bookshelves and a table spread with pamphlets. In many languages, they retold the ghetto's disaster. I looked for copies of *The Wall* and, finding none, asked whether the survivors had read it. Dr. Karmisch said the kibbutz had several copies. They were around, being read.

He shrugged lightly. "They are glad he wrote it, but they do not think it is true to the facts."

I tried to explain that a novelist has the privilege of choosing whatever proportion of fact he requires, of inventing, of blowing hot, blowing cold, on historic events for artistic effects. The two men—Karmisch and Antek—agreed to that, but Antek said quietly he did not feel that Hersey had given recog-

nition enough to "our underground." When I pressed him to explain, he replied he would be pleased if we stayed to have lunch.

We went out of the museum. The air was refreshing, was good. "The sea is before us," Antek said, "and the mountains behind. We have four thousand dunams. We have a fine place."

Across the road, rusting, lay coils of barbed wire, surrounding an abandoned British Army cantonment. It struck me as more than strange that these people who so long had lived back of barbed wire now kept this here, in daily sight. Masochism, I thought, they torture themselves deliberately, guilty perhaps because they alone have survived. To them the past is all that is real. But can it also be (I felt impelled to revise my thought) that they've progressed so that barbed wire has become meaningless and they can see it yet no longer see it, defy the symbol because they are free and alive and part of a creative life? No, I thought again, that cannot be so, else why do they cherish each macabre scrap?

I called Antek's attention to the wire and asked him why it still was there. "We have not had time to remove it," he answered. "We have more important things to do here."

WE WERE late for lunch. The long, cool dining hall was all but empty. Most of the members of the kibbutz had eaten and gone back to work. Antek cleared and wiped off a table for us, brought in a platter of bread, set down our spoons, carried in metal soup plates with *kasha* and meat balls in gravy. As is the custom in the kibbutzim, meat or fish and vegetables are served first, in their gravy. You wipe your plate clean with a chunk of bread and ladle soup into the dish. As we finished our *kasha* and meat, Antek glanced at me and got up. He hurried into the kitchen and brought out clean soup bowls. "It isn't necessary," I said. "I have eaten in a kibbutz before." He blushed, but he smiled faintly and seemed pleased. The soup was an excellent *borscht*. I praised it. "It's a real *borscht*."

"Everything here is real," he answered stiffly. We finished without more conversa-

tion. He brought out a bowl of oranges. Then he said, if we were interested he would like to show us the rest of the kibbutz.

We walked slowly along the paths between the small cement houses. We received the statistics: the kibbutz had two hundred and sixty people, one hundred and eighty adults. It had taken in forty Iraqi and Syrian orphans. The kibbutz was getting along well enough. Here were the workshops; there were the barns; there the orchards of young fruit trees. Here was the school; there the culture building. As an achievement in building up, the place was indeed impressive.

But Joe Davis had been correct after all. Something about the place was depressing. This was springtime in Galilee. Everywhere fields were freshly green. Scarlet anemones spangled the grass. Yet here it was barren and bleak. Some attempt had been made to plant flowers. They hadn't done well, were scraggly and sparse. There were no lawns, no shade trees. It almost seemed as though most of what had been left of strength and of will in the group had been channeled into perpetuating memories of a barbarous past.

"What is your work here?" I asked Antek while we walked along.

"I used to drive a tractor."

"And now?"

"I am sick."

The familiar silence dropped between us again.

WE CAME at the end of the afternoon to the infants' house, a small white cement building, with a red roof, like the museum. It was nap time and therefore we couldn't go in and so we stood on tiptoe and peered through a screen. In an immaculate nursery, five rosy infants lay asleep in their cribs.

Then, all at once, the man who had been Antek turned to me. "I have a son sleeping there," he said. He spoke quietly.

In the book that Hersey wrote about the Warsaw ghetto, a baby is born in the underground bunkers where the fighters hide. It is a precious infant but it is hungry and therefore it cries. The noise of its crying puts all the others in peril and the child must be killed. It is put to death by the Hashomer man, the man modeled on Antek himself.

"I have a son sleeping there," Antek had said. In those six words he told me everything I wished to know.

THE ILLUSION

DAVID IGNATOW

She was saying mad things,
like To hell with the world!
Love is all you need! Go on
and get it! What are you
waiting for! And she walked,
more like shuffled, up the street,
her eyes fixed in the distance.
She would not divert them
for one moment. People stepped
self consciously out of the way.

What are you waiting for, snarled
from her lips; it seemed directed
really to herself, to someone inside
whom she fought with. The shredded hem
of her dress rustled around her.
Straight up stood her hair, wild.
In the crowded thoroughfare, all of a roar,
no one person distinguishable
in the hurry,
shuffling only she seemed real.

DAVID IGNATOW, who has had a number of poems in the pages of COMMENTARY, is the author of several volumes of poetry.

THE DAY THE FBI CAME TO OUR HOUSE

America's Security Police in Action

HARRY GERSH

IT WAS about two-thirty in the afternoon of a warm Saturday a couple of months ago when the FBI came to our house. I was weeding the pachysandra, wearing an old pair of gray flannels and an army shirt. Smoking a pipe, of course. Four kids on three bicycles and a pedal jeep came by with an awful racket. Up the street the older kids were trying out the footballs they had unearthed from the pile of baseball equipment. The lawns were sunny but the sidewalks were in shade. Down the middle of the street there was a long, thin, dappled runner of sun where the trees didn't quite meet overhead.

A blue 1950 Pontiac sedan pulled up in front of the doctor's house across the street from my pachysandra. I knew the doctor didn't have office hours Saturday afternoon, so I turned to see who was coming to visit whom. (A small amount of neighborly busybodyness is acceptable in Tuckahoe.) Two men sat in the front seat of the car. They looked up and down the street, casually, but they didn't look at me or my house. Then they got out and walked directly across the street toward me. Somehow I knew better than to act surprised, so I stood up and turned to meet them.

The man who had been driving was in the

lead. He wore brown. Brown, rubber-soled shoes; brown gabardine slacks, a button-down oxford shirt with striped rep tie; tan slipover; tan herringbone jacket; a brown hat. He looked like a happy, healthy, wealthy Irishman. He wasn't, in fact, Irish, and he could hardly have been wealthy. But he was certainly healthy. The second man was just that, a sort of professional second man. He wore brown too. Brown shoes; a brown worsted suit with a faint stripe and with a vest; a white shirt with a small-figured brown tie; tan topcoat and a brown hat. He had a gold chain between the two bottom pockets of his vest. He was long-faced and wore steel-rimmed glasses.

The lead man, we'll call him Mr. Walsh, smiled at me and said, "Good afternoon." The second man, Mr. Brown, grunted. I just smiled.

"You're Mr. Gersh? Harry Gersh?" Mr. Walsh asked. I nodded. "We're from the FBI." I gawked. Remembering back, I think they cast steely, all-encompassing glances up and down the street, Mr. Walsh looking south, Mr. Brown looking north, as the letters "FBI" were uttered. But I'm not sure. Mr. Walsh did ask hurriedly whether we couldn't go into the house. I nodded, maybe I grunted. Anyway, I did lead them into the house.

After three years in the navy I am not easily surprised, astonished, or shocked. But the navy had never prepared me for this situation. While I walked up the steps I searched feverishly back into time. What had I done, advertently or inadvertently? Into what great danger had I brought my country? I played football until 1932, and was an active anti-Commie after that. I had returned every registered publication sent to me by the navy. I often think of robbing

CAME the 1950's, and thousands of quite law-abiding Americans found themselves undergoing an experience novel to the American scene: the FBI came to their homes and asked them to talk about someone they knew—not in the way of idle gossip, but to help fill out an FBI dossier. Here, HARRY GERSH tells of such a visit, and describes how he and his wife felt about it. Mr. Gersh is assistant educational director of the Textile Workers of America (CIO) and has been a frequent contributor to COMMENTARY.

one of the three banks I pass on my way to work, but I never have and, besides, they're state banks. I burst into a sweat as I remembered the radar timer I had used as a clock in my workroom. But it was broken now and couldn't ever have been important enough for the FBI. They said the captain had decommissioned his gig and taken it home and no one had fussed about that. I couldn't think of a thing that would bring the FBI to my door on a Saturday afternoon even if they did look like all the commuters who got on my train at Bronxville. I hadn't thought of anything by the time we were inside and hidden from the neighbors.

As soon as he was inside, Mr. Walsh showed me his credentials. They looked innocent enough, not even a silver badge. Just a "... this is to certify ..." and a picture which might have been anyone's. I didn't examine it too closely and I wasn't in a mood to do much comparing. I always trembled when an immigration officer looked too closely at my passport picture.

MY WIFE, Violet, hearing visitors, came smiling and bustling into the living room. She looked flushed, pretty, and incongruous. She was flushed because she'd just put a cake into the oven; pretty because she is; incongruous because of a too gay apron covering the top of rolled-up dungarees. I introduced her anyway.

To the FBI men I said, "This is my wife, Violet." I felt they probably knew too much about me for me to use the formal "Mrs. Gersh."

To Violet I said, "These men are ... they're from ... uh ... FBI." The FBI came out on a rising note. Violet looked at them as if they were human and said hello.

Mr. Walsh was still smiling. He asked, "Were you formerly Violet Eberil?" I gawked again. It's been sixteen years since my wife was known as Violet Eberil. It was scary having the FBI recall her maiden name. We weren't even married in New York. Violet nodded. I was afraid to look at her. Mr. Walsh continued, "It's you we've really come to see. May we talk to you?"

I heard Johnny come through the back door and I was thankful that the glass decided to stay together this time. He came through the kitchen at a dead run, rounded the turn into the dining room and pulled up short in the living-room door with a gun in each hand, a scowl on his face. "Reach," he commanded. Then he saw the FBI men and was embarrassed. He looked at them sideways and asked, "Who are those men, Daddy?"

How do you tell a four-year-old that the FBI has come to question his mother about some secret of her past? A secret so dark that even his father doesn't have an inkling as to what it might be. How do you explain to one of the brightest lights of the Sarah Lawrence College Nursery School that his mother is in the toils of the federal internal security police? I picked up Johnny and sat him on my knee.

"They're men," I said flatly.

"What men?"

"They came to ask Mommy and Daddy some questions. Go outside and play."

"No. I want to hear."

I knew enough not to press the point. Johnny stayed to hear. So did I, though for a moment I thought the FBI would ask me to leave. Afterward, I wondered what I would have done if they had asked me to leave them alone with my wife. Refused? Agreed? Called a lawyer?

Mr. Brown took a corner chair and sort of faded into it. During the hour and a half that they were there he didn't say more than three sentences. Most of the time I forgot that he was there. Maybe we were supposed to forget Mr. Brown.

Mr. Walsh put us at our ease. A little too easily, perhaps. He said that they were looking for information but that it had nothing to do with us personally. Somehow that didn't make me feel better. It had an even more ominous sound. Walsh joked with Johnny but Johnny didn't respond. He talked about how pleasant was the day and how nice our living room. Then he said, "Mrs. Gersh, does the Bronx Free Fellowship mean anything to you?"

THIS time both my wife and I gawked. We gawked at each other. We laughed. We both started to talk at once. Mr. Walsh cut me out neatly and quickly. He wasn't interested in me at all.

The Bronx Free Fellowship was a church, a debating society, a Friday evening social, and an intellectual circus. It was wonderful. As we remembered, it was run by a Unitarian minister who preached a social gospel, as who didn't during the depression? After some sort of non-denominational, non-partisan services, the congregation would debate an important issue of the day: How to Cure the Depression, Socialism vs. Communism, Apples or Public Ownership, Moses, Jesus, or Marx, Planned Parenthood.

After it had been running for a while the members of the Fellowship divided roughly into four groups—Communist, Socialist, independent radicals too wild-eyed even to adhere to the splinter groups, and a fourth section of see-both-sides, can't-make-up-my-mind, you're-both-a-little-right liberals. The BFF was a wonderful training ground for street-corner speakers, for building logical positions on illogical premises, and for sharpening the retort discourteous of the heckler. It was Union Square with a chairman and a roof. But there was no solid membership in the BFF, there was no movement to win control over, so the Socialists and Communists and others could meet together without anything stronger than a nasty word. All this was at its peak in the early 30's. And now the FBI asked my wife did it mean anything to her.

Violet finished gawking at me and said, "Yes, the Bronx Free Fellowship does mean something to me."

"What?"

"It was an organization I belonged to. I went to the Fellowship meetings a long time ago."

Bit by patient bit, the patience on both sides, Violet explained the Fellowship and her place in it to the FBI. It was a slow job, but complete. I watched Mr. Walsh to see if he believed her story. I couldn't tell. But he kept going back, over and over again,

digging deeper, asking for the same thing in other words. I didn't like it.

FOR all Mr. Walsh's boyish good looks and open face, there was something unhealthy about the whole thing. It bothered me and I could sense that it bothered my wife. In the constant digging back for minutiae they seemed to be building somebody's coffin out of coral. And we didn't know whose. Or maybe it was last week's headlines about McCarthy that colored our feelings.

Mr. Walsh had many verses to his song but he kept repeating a single chorus: "Who? Who? Who?" Violet would say, "We did so-and-so." Walsh would immediately jump in with "Who did so-and-so? Who said that? Which friends went with you?" Every time this happened Violet looked helplessly at me. I knew quite well why she looked helpless. She just didn't remember. She never does. Any day now I expect to come home, have her kiss me, and say, "It's silly, dear, but I just can't think of your name." But Mr. Brown, sitting back, watching us as if through a microscope, probably didn't believe her protestations that she didn't remember. He probably thought she was looking at me for strength or instructions.

This constant "who, who, who?" didn't help Violet in trying to recall names. One of the active BFFers is still a friend of ours. We see him fairly frequently. In the middle of the questioning Violet couldn't remember his name. I helped her out. I don't know whether Mr. Walsh's glance at me was thanks or warning. And even when we did remember names there was a hesitation. Why do they want to know? What trouble are we getting these people into? There was something lousy about the whole business.

After a time Mr. Walsh gave up the indirect approach. I could have told him it wouldn't work on Violet. He came out with it: "As we understand it, Mrs. Gersh, there were two main groups in the BFF. A Communist group and a socialistic group."

That did it. My wife and I have usually voted for Norman Thomas. We were members of the Socialist party. We are still friendly to it and its principles. But there is one thing we are unfriendly to—that's the word "socialistic" and anyone using it. Perhaps this is neurotic but it's a widespread neurosis. There probably isn't any such word. In any case it grates on all Socialists and most others who have intelligent knowledge of the political movements of our country. I have never heard the word "socialistic" used by a person who knew what he was talking about.

Violet and I looked at each other again. This time it wasn't for help, it was understanding. We knew why Mr. Walsh used "socialistic." His records showed that we were Socialists and he didn't think that that was a nice thing to be. He was trying to spare our feelings. So he softened the blow by calling Violet's group the "socialistic" one. That didn't soften the blow at all. It just hardened us. Up to that moment we were two citizens anxiously trying to help the aura-surrounded intelligence officers of our government. After the "socialistic" we were a couple of citizens having to put up with a couple of cops a little out of their depth—and likely to make costly mistakes. We may have been unfair. Then again, we may have been eminently fair. It was lousy.

Violet agreed that there had been a Communist and a Socialist group in the BFF. She volunteered the fact that she had been an active speaker and applauder (very important since there were no votes taken) for the Socialist group. They dragged through that for a while, and again Mr. Walsh found out that the indirect method wouldn't work.

"Who led the Communists, Mrs. Gersh? Who spoke for them? Names, names."

Violet was blank again. She really was. I was used to it. Mr. Walsh wasn't. It didn't seem to sit too well with the FBI. Some direct questions and then some indirect. They could neither catch her (their view, I think) nor awaken her memory (my view).

"I can't remember their names. I can't even remember their faces," she told them.

JOHNNY had been sitting on my lap through all this. Suddenly he entered the conversation. "Who are they, Daddy?" I was struck again. I thought of policemen but decided against it. I had a bright idea. "They're detectives." But there are large gaps, unexpected gaps in the education of a four-year-old. Johnny knows all about cowboys, space rovers, baseball, babies, money, and soldiers. Detectives he doesn't know. They don't have uniforms. So I tried again. "They're FBI men." I started to explain about the FBI. Mr. Walsh interrupted.

"Don't make a point of it, Mr. Gersh," he warned. Later I worried over why the FBI didn't want Johnny to know that they had come to question his mother. I wasn't ashamed.

About half an hour after they started the questioning the FBI gave up the indirect method and the direct indirect method. We still hadn't the faintest idea why they had come. Suddenly Mr. Walsh told us.

"Mrs. Gersh, does the name Philip Baird mean anything to you?"

Violet and I gawked again. It was our favorite expression that Saturday afternoon. Violet smiled, then she giggled, got flustered, became a little frightened, and finally answered, "It does."

Philip Baird, which isn't his real name or his professional name, is a Hollywood figure. He starved and fought his way through the professional schools, made a deserved reputation for himself on Broadway, and went to Hollywood. He's done all right for himself there too. During Violet's first years in college she was his girl friend. No, I'd better put it the other way. He was her boy friend. They were a pair for two years. Then, according to the story I get, she told him to git. Seems there was another, etc., etc. They hadn't seen each other in twenty years. During the time of the Spanish Civil War and the Moscow Trials Baird's name was publicized in some Commie fronts, causes, and benefit performances. The same can

be said for half the people in Hollywood. They saw *Bury the Dead* and *The Grapes of Wrath* and became great humanitarian souls and greater political brains. I thought Baird was a fool, didn't like his politics, but didn't know anything about him except what was in the public press. Violet knew no more than I did. Now, after twenty years, Mr. Walsh wanted to know if the name Philip Baird meant anything to her.

WITH everything out in the open, Mr. Walsh again reassured us that the whole thing had nothing to do with us personally. They were seeking information about Baird. They didn't care what we were or what we disclosed about ourselves. They protested too much. I wondered about the ethics of that, since everyone is worrying about the ethics of government.

My wife, bless her, is herself a handy one with questions. Now she turned on the FBI and wanted to know why she and why Baird and why the Bronx Free Fellowship. But the FBI wasn't answering that day. They were asking. So, since we were the hosts, we answered.

"What," asked the FBI with downcast eyes, "was the relationship between Violet and Baird?" Having a Hollywood boy friend, or a boy friend who made good in Hollywood, is nothing to be ashamed of in America. So Violet gave it to him straight.

"The relationship was personal," she said. Then she let out a shriek. Even Mr. Brown looked interested at that. Violet shrieked, jumped up, and rushed for the kitchen yelling, "My cake! My cake!" There was some clattering in the kitchen, the usual soft oaths as she burned her hands, and she came back carrying a tin cake-pan but smiling.

"My cake almost burned," she explained.

Mr. Walsh laughed. "We cause more cakes to burn. . . ."

After Violet had finished messing with things in the kitchen and making the short prayer all women make that the cake wouldn't fall, she came back to the living room and the questioning. They went back

to Philip Baird in 1932-1934. She told the story quite willingly. No, Baird hadn't been a member of the BFF. He had been too busy with other things. In fact, if he had ever come to a BFF meeting, he came because Violet took him. It was fun and free. Baird was completely apolitical in those years. If anything, a little on the reactionary side. Violet's mother, who had a wholesome down on the "interests," had looked askance at Baird because he was such a right-winger.

Walsh broke down Violet's story seven ways. But every time he built it up again with a new set of questions it came out the same. Baird just didn't have it politically.

In the middle of that episode Mr. Walsh was struck by a new idea. "Would you have known if Baird was a Communist?"

Violet's answer was almost automatic. "Of course."

"How?"

Violet looked at me again. The question seemed silly to her. "By what they said. By their attitudes and stands on issues. By how they argued. By a lot of things."

"What things?" The FBI is nothing if not specific. I wondered how they did with other female questionees.

Violet shrugged her shoulders and looked at me. This time for help.

"You develop a sort of sixth sense when you live with them for a while," I volunteered. They jumped on that "live with them" phrase. I explained that I meant constant meetings in school, student organizations, clubs, fraternal groups, unions. Everything had had a Communist and an anti-Communist, Socialist-led caucus back in those days. But obviously the FBI didn't believe in any sixth sense. Mr. Walsh explained it by using words like "evidentiary" and "situs." He really did.

Walsh had another new idea. "Mrs. Gersh, would you tell us if you knew anything about Mr. Baird."

"Yes," she answered, "I would. But I just don't know anything about Philip Baird that might help you."

I think I was the only one to catch the faint note of glee when she admitted her

lack of knowledge. The FBI men went back to work. They tried an entirely new tack.

The continual rehashing of a story I already knew began to get boring. Johnny was squirming like a fresh-caught flounder. But he wouldn't leave his mother with those men. He didn't seem to trust me to protect her. I tried to figure out the FBI method. First, by getting Violet to talk freely about the BFF, they tried to trap her into naming Baird. Then, without mentioning him, they tried to get her to name him among the known Communists in the BFF. When that didn't work they put it directly. Now they were working on his financial situation. It puzzled me for a while, then I figured that they were trying to find out if he had been a plausible target for Communist recruitment. They failed there too.

"He was broke," Violet said. "So broke I had to pay for the movies when we went. He used to come up to the house for dinner, and it wasn't merely social. He needed the meal. He had a scholarship at the professional school and worked a bit on the side. But he was starving most of the time."

I don't know what Mr. Walsh did during the depression but his experiences were not the same as ours. He acted as if Violet were baring a dark, and not nice, secret when she told of paying for Baird. She wasn't embarrassed. Neither was I. She used to pay for me sometimes when I was broke. Maybe the FBI doesn't approve of these things.

After that it was like going around on the carousel after the novelty has worn off. The same questions with the words in different places. Sometimes with the question mark hidden. The story didn't change. Philip Baird had been Violet's boy friend. He had never spoken at the BFF, at least in her memory. He was completely without politics while she knew him.

At the end Mr. Walsh asked that toughest of questions again: "Would you tell us if you knew?"

We both said yes. I guess it's true.

An hour and a half after they had come,

they got up to leave. Johnny helped by asking, "Why don't they go, Daddy?"

THE FBI men had been pleasant, thoughtful of the niceties, and averagely intelligent about the subject of their investigation. It was apparent that they had no special knowledge of the left-wing or Communist movement in this country. It was hard to understand how they could do a good job, find the guilty and protect the innocent, without it, but I didn't quarrel with them about that. There didn't seem to be anything I could do about it at the moment except be polite. I was. It was while they were leaving that they made their big mistake.

I guess politeness and a wish to be pleasant to someone whose afternoon you've wasted made Mr. Walsh say what he did. "Well, Mrs. Gersh," he said, "that's all behind you now."

Violet looked peculiar. I could have warned him but I didn't know how. I don't remember the exact words he used next, so I won't put quotation marks around them, but this is the sense of the comment:

You're clean now, Mrs. Gersh. You've been mixed up in some rather shady things in the past, Socialists, Communists, but it must have been youthful wildness. You're well rid of it, as we can see from this house and this street and talking to you. You can depend on us to keep it quiet. No one will know about your record.

It was the wrong thing to say to anyone with our background, especially Violet. "Mr. Walsh," she said loudly and distinctly, "I've got a good record, regardless of what the FBI thinks, and I'm proud of it." She went on in that vein for a while. She was working herself up to the point where she'd be sorry she voted for Roosevelt instead of Thomas. But I could see that neither Mr. Walsh nor Mr. Brown understood what they had done nor why Violet was being so vociferous, so I broke in to say our good-byes. I had to edge Violet back into the house. The FBI men waved once going across the street, got into their car, and drove off.

DEATH OF A GENIUS

The Last Days of Thomas Wolfe

HANS MEYERHOFF

THIS happened in Washington, D. C., on September 15, 1948, when I was looking for a room. Arriving in the city, I had bought an early edition of the evening paper and picked the first chance address advertising a room that sounded moderately convenient and attractive.

The house I came to was located in what was once—thirty or forty years ago—a residential suburb in the northwest district of the city. But the city, ever expanding, had swallowed up the suburb long ago. Residences once fashionable now showed familiar symptoms of age and decay; others once exclusively private now admitted strangers who paid for room and board.

A woman opened the door. My first impression of her made me hesitate: she seemed to fit the appearance of the house she lived in. But when she invited me in, this first impression quickly dissolved. I noticed that she was a physically powerful woman, of big stature, over six feet tall. And then I noticed the most extraordinary thing about her: the way she talked. She talked incessantly; and the way she talked made you forget her unattractive outward appearance almost instantly. There was an irresistible, compelling quality behind the uninterrupted flow of words; behind the quaint, powerful images invoked, behind the compulsive dedication to details on a very personal, intimate level. It was as if she were driven by a deep emo-

tional need to recover in words something about herself that was forever lost in real life. There was a grandeur in this frantic pursuit of personal memories which lifted her spontaneous intimacy above the level of ordinary gossip.

I agreed to the terms for the room, then explained that my stay would be brief. I was on my way to Berlin, Germany.

"Berlin," she repeated. "I wonder what it's like there now?" She had always wanted to go there herself. She had heard so much about it, from Tom and other people. But now? It must be a frightful mess over there. "And from the way it looks in the newspapers we are right back where we started, don't you think?"

Yes, she had always wanted to travel, go abroad, see strange places and meet strange people; but she had never been able to get away. Always work, rent rooms, take in boarders, try to make ends meet—just like Mama. Once she had even thought of having a career. She had studied singing. But nothing came of it: just some variety shows and third-rate motion picture theaters. And she soon learned better than to keep trying. Some people never learn when it's time to quit, don't you know?

"Tom wrote all about it; I mean, me and my career. It's in *Look Homeward, Angel*. I am Helen in the book; pretty name, Helen, don't you think?"

I said yes, it was, realizing at the same time (with a sense of relief at knowing something about this strange encounter) that this woman was the eldest sister of the novelist Thomas Wolfe.

She invited me into the living room: overstuffed furniture, doilies, bric-a-brac vases and ashtrays—"typically middle class," she said, "although I have never been able to

HANS MEYERHOFF was born in Germany in 1914 and came to this country in 1934. He is assistant professor of philosophy at the University of California at Los Angeles. This description of the last days of the novelist Thomas Wolfe, presented here as a continuous narrative, is constructed from numerous conversations with the novelist's sister.

find out what's wrong with *that*." Tom was all around. Three big pictures of him on the walls: the massive, broad, "apelike" frame of the man, the long arms, the large hands, the thick, black, unruly hair, and then, by contrast, the youthful face, almost childlike in its innocence, the lines of the mouth thin and weak. There was an old chest filled with keepsakes: Tom's hat, Tom's suit, scrapbooks, notebooks, diaries, essays, snapshots, and bundles of letters—most of them to Helen, some of them to her mother. Her mother's picture was on the wall too: the gaunt, sharp face of Eliza with the thin lips and the shrewd, clear eyes.

The woman rummaged through the chest reading snatches from letters and looking at pictures: Tom in Berlin, Tom in school, Tom with the family, Tom at Helen's wedding, the house in Asheville, Ben, Eliza, the old W.O., their father long dead—and now the stream of memories poured forth with the intensity of a prayer, with the dedication of performing a solemn ritual.

"He wrote about Germany too, don't you know? It's in *The Web and the Rock*. That's where he tells the story of this frightful thing that happened at the *Oktoberfest* in Munich." She always thought that was where he first injured his brain. It was a wonder he didn't bleed to death right then and there. But that was Tom for you: you could never tell what he was going to do from one moment to the next. He drove himself to death, burned himself out, as it were. There was nothing anybody could do to stop him, not even Mama. Yes, she was quite sure, quite sure in spite of what the doctors said afterwards—for what do doctors know, after all?—that it must have left a permanent injury to his brain, this frightful accident at the carnival in Munich when someone broke a beer mug over Tom's head and he almost bled to death. Otherwise there was nothing wrong with him, nothing ever. He was big and strong, like his father, bigger than herself. And to think that he'd be the first to go.

It was too much. Him dying the way he did and as early as he did. She got into a terrible automobile accident right afterwards:

just stepped off the curb, in a complete trance, right into a car anybody with his five senses all together could have seen miles away. "I guess I was trying to kill myself, too. People do that sort of thing, don't you think?"

After a brief pause: "I reckon it will always be with me for the rest of my life. I can see him now as he was when I lifted him up, heavy and dead, in the hospital in Baltimore. I can see him as if it were yesterday. And here it's been ten years."

IT WAS only fitting that she should have been the most intimate witness of Tom's death. She had always been closest to him. She had always been close to all the men in the family: to W. O., the father, to Steve, the oldest, to Luke, the religious one, to Ben, alone and bitter, to Grover—as Tom called them in his books—and, finally, to Tom, Mama's baby. She had always been close to all the men—sometimes to the chagrin of Mama and Daisy, her sister. Perhaps it was because she had taken charge of the family for many years: that's when Tom was still a baby, and Mama was running the boarding house, "Dixieland," you know; perhaps it was because the men felt more at ease with her than with Mama and Daisy. Mama, raising her voice, did not always approve. "Helen," she would say, "they come running after you because you are just like one of them." But she didn't mind. You need somebody like that in a big family, don't you know?

Yes, she had always been close to Tom and the men in the family: she was proud of it, too. Take the time, for instance, a long time ago (he was still a youngster then), when she got Tom out of jail. That was in the middle of the night—two o'clock in the morning or so. Luke and the other boys didn't know what to do, trying to get him out before the morning, afraid to come in and wake Mama. Then they'd come and told Helen; and she got him out of jail without making any fuss. She was good at that sort of thing; and the boys knew they could trust her. Her husband—he is Randy Shep-

perton in the books—was nice about it, too; but it wasn't always easy on him. He'd often say he didn't know why he married into such a crazy family.

Or the time when Tom came to see her in Washington. She was running an apartment house then, downtown; and a hard time they had of it, too. It was summer weather, hot, humid, unbearable. He wanted to stay only for a day. That's all the time he had. Instead he stayed for ten days; and for five nights they sat up alone, just the two of them, brother and sister, all night—all night, mind you, until six o'clock in the morning when the sun was out again—talking, talking, and talking. . . . In the late afternoon he liked to sit on a bench in the park watching the people passing by, especially when it was closing time in the government offices. Then they would play a fascinating game inventing stories, cracking jokes, guessing what was behind the faces, tired and harassed, of the people hurrying home. Tom said that none of them looked as if they enjoyed what they were doing.

Yes, it was only fitting that she should have been with him during the last weeks of his life. She and the nurse from Asheville rushed out to Seattle when word came of his illness. Pneumonia, the doctors said; they took him to Providence Hospital in Seattle. Only, it turned out later, it wasn't a real pneumonia, after all; it was what they called a non-localized pneumonia. "You must realize, Mrs. S.," the doctor told her later, "that this was never an ordinary case of pneumonia." But that was much later, when the crisis came.

Yet when she got out there, everything was fine. There was a specialist from Vienna, the most competent man in the field; and he, too, had assured her that everything was fine, that there was absolutely no danger, that there was no doubt about the outcome. Tom had been a very sick boy when he was taken to the hospital; but that was some time ago, and he was coming along fine. There was nothing to worry about any more, nothing to be afraid of. Tom would be all right.

That's what they had told her when she got out there. That was also the reason why the doctor didn't want Mama to come out to the West Coast. It wasn't necessary for the old lady to make such a long and strenuous trip. Tom was coming along fine. He would be all right.

AND so it seemed, indeed. Tom was getting better. He had lost a lot of weight, but he was looking fine: pale, thinner, and weaker after a long illness, but also younger and healthier. He looked like a man who needed food, good home-cooked food, to get some strength back into his bones. And that's what he wanted, too; food, plenty of food, good food, rich food: steaks—sirloins and porterhouses—chops, roast beef, pickled peaches of the Teagarden variety, country gentleman corn, string beans sliced so thin the pieces became transparent, muffins as they used to make them at home with buttermilk, and then salads in wooden bowls (he wouldn't have them in any other container): lettuce, tomatoes, grapefruit, avocados, crabmeat—for days they talked nothing but food.

That was the time, too, when he wrote the letter to Max, his old friend and editor—his last letter as it turned out, a beautiful letter: "Dear Max: . . . I have made a long voyage and been to a strange country, and I have seen the dark man very close; and I don't think I was too much afraid of him, but so much of mortality still clings to me. I wanted most desperately to live and still do, and I thought about you all a thousand times, and I wanted to see you all again, and there was the impossible anguish and regret of all the work I had not done, of all the work I had to do—and I know now I am just a grain of dust, and I feel as if a great window had been opened on life I did not know about before—and if I come through this, I hope to God I am a better man, and in some strange way I can't explain I know I am a deeper and wiser one. . . ."

She remembered how she had smuggled the paper into Tom's room against the doctor's orders, how she had watched that no-

body would come in while he was writing it, and how she had posted it: his last letter. Yes, Tom felt more hopeful again than he had for a long time, less morbid, less depressed, more like living and writing again—once he got through with this. And there was no doubt that he would get through with it all right. He was coming along fine. He was feeling better than ever—except for the headaches. There were always the headaches, which he didn't seem to be able to shake off despite the drugs he was taking all the time. Even the doctors didn't seem to know what to make of them.

HE WAS coming along so fine that he was due to be released from the hospital the following Sunday. Tom rebelled against the word "released" because it reminded him of being in prison rather than in a hospital. But, anyway, she would never forget that Sunday. That was the day he was set to leave the hospital. That was the day she lost him—lost him forever. Just when she thought he was back on his feet, back in the fold of the family he never left—she lost him. She would never forget that Sunday in the late summer of 1938, never as long as she lived.

They were to go to the Spring Apartments Hotel, the best in town. She had already stocked up with food; for on Sunday night she would cook him a special meal according to detailed plans they had worked out together. After Sunday, Tom decided, there would be no more cooking in the apartment. They would eat downstairs in the dining room of the hotel. He did not want the women—herself and the nurse—to cook and work. He wanted them to have a fine time. He wired for \$10,000 from his bank in New York—\$8,500 of which he immediately put in her name because she was paying all the bills and expenses. When she pleaded for more economy—hers had been a hard life, don't you know—he lectured her at length on the subject of parsimony. "Don't be parsimonious, Helen," he said. "You don't know what harm parsimony has done to people. It's killed so many lives. Remember how it killed Ben." She said she

didn't think it killed Ben, but she didn't argue the point.

There was Sunday morning. He was up and about helping her with packing. They had a great time getting him dressed. He had lost so much weight that she needed two big safety pins to pull his trousers together so that they would fit him at all. They joked with each other, laughed, reminisced, made plans. He seemed in excellent shape.

The doctor came once more and talked about the headaches, as if he had never known about them before. What about the headaches? And why not stay until tomorrow, Monday, so that he could take new X-rays? He looked at Tom's eyes again through the ophthalmoscope. He again suggested Tom stay until tomorrow for a complete examination by an eye specialist. Then he ordered some new medicine made up. Tom grew restless, suspicious, hostile, as if he knew what was behind the headaches and didn't need any doctor to tell him. He wanted to get out of the hospital. He wanted to be free.

Helen left the hospital for a bite to eat, then wrote letters to the family: hopeful letters telling them about Tom's recovery, and how he was to be released from the hospital later in the day. Then suddenly she heard herself paged in the lobby of the hotel, and she was frightened. She sensed instantly, behind the mechanical, fateful voice of the paging system, that a new crisis was threatening and that there was no escape.

It was the nurse calling for help. Tom was worse. The new medicine had had alarming effects. Tom was talking incoherently. Helen hurried back to the hospital, rushed through the corridors, trying to preserve some "nonchalance," as she called it, some calm outward appearance with which to meet the new emergency.

TOM met her at the door of his room staring past her. She immediately saw how much worse he was. "Hello, Tom." "Hello, Helen." She was glad he recognized her, but she was frightened again by what followed:

"How did you get here," he asked, "by plane?" "Tom, honey, you know I always take the streetcar." At that he became angry: Why didn't somebody drive her? Why didn't she at least take a taxi? She tried to calm him down. "Tom, darling, you are tired. It's these pills, they have made you tired again. Lie down and let me rub your head." Yes, he was tired, and he lay down, and she rubbed his head with witch hazel (he did not like any alcoholic rubs); and that was soothing. But all afternoon he continued to talk incoherently. Streams of people were coming to see him, he said; and he couldn't keep them apart, and he couldn't talk to them any more because he was so tired and because he couldn't recognize their faces. And night came amidst his agony, ending this Sunday when she lost him forever.

Then she heard, for the first time, the fateful words: "choked disks." She didn't understand; she was never too good with these technical terms anyway, don't you know? She told the nurse. "O God, not that!" The nurse turned pale. "Let's get him out of here. They are keeping him under dope all the time. It's worse than in the mental sanitariums at Asheville. Let's get him out of here."

But it was too late. New X-rays confirmed the doctor's diagnosis. You see, it wasn't a case of ordinary pneumonia, after all. Now it was a tuberculosis of the brain or some form of cerebral meningitis: she never did learn the correct medical term, and what difference does it make anyway when you've got to die? She felt deeply resentful toward the doctors—as she was to feel again and again during the next few weeks. They were at fault. She hated them. They hadn't played this thing straight. They had made a wrong diagnosis. They didn't let Mama come out to Seattle. She should have had these last weeks with her baby. But no, they said it wasn't necessary. Tom was coming along fine. And he was. But that was this morning when they were packing and tucking his trousers together with the two big safety pins. That was a long time ago; now it was night, too late to think how well he was

or might have been. There was only one thing to do: take him to the best doctor in the country at the Johns Hopkins hospital in Baltimore.

ON TUESDAY night they took the "Olympian" from Seattle to Chicago. The trip was comparatively uneventful—except for the first night. They had given Tom a hypodermic to put him to sleep, and both nurse and sister had left him for a little while to get some food. When they returned to the compartment he was gone. They found him, after a frantic search, seven cars up, wandering about looking for a telegraph office to send a wire to some friends in New York.

His condition improved during the train ride. It seemed as if the old magic of the train rolling through the forlorn and promising vastness of the American continent was again weaving its spell around the sick man as it had done so many times in his flights from time and the river. At times he seemed to feel much better, without any severe pain, almost cheerful, joking about the food and the train, conscious again of the ever changing face of this nation he so loved.

But he was sick, very sick. She remembered one incident in particular which showed how he suffered. He had locked himself in the washroom and couldn't come out again. He would always go to the washroom alone. He was very shy in these matters, don't you know? Now he couldn't find the latch which would release the door. Patiently she explained to him from the other side of the door how to move his hands so as to find the latch and slide it back. Patiently he followed her instructions. She could hear his fingers blindly fumbling the door; she could hear him breathing heavily, painfully. She was afraid he would collapse any moment. She was ready to break the door down with the weight of her own body. Finally he found the latch—and the door opened. There he stood, filling the frame of the open door, gray, drawn, perspiring, holding his head with both hands in agonizing pain: "Oh Helen, my head! God, what's the matter with my head?"

The ambulance was waiting at the station in Chicago. So was Mama. Helen had sent wires everywhere and to everybody. Mama had arrived the previous night and had been sitting up all night in the waiting room of the station, waiting for the train to come in. Everybody in the station seemed to know about their train coming through. The Western Union operator recognized Mama. It was he who had relayed all the family messages through Chicago. The ticket officer selling Mama a berth on the train out of Chicago recognized her. Mama was pleased and gratified. How famous the family had become because of Tom. Mama had brought a big basket of food and fruit from Asheville, and on the morning of their arrival in Baltimore, when they could not get any breakfast on the train, she produced the fruit from home and Tom ate fresh grapes and five peaches. Mama was chagrined, though, at the intimacy between the nurse and Tom; but there was nothing anybody could do or say at this point.

After Chicago he was more restless and more in pain. Helen had an upper berth opposite Tom's lower. Sometimes they would reach out across the compartment and hold each other's hands.

She told him about their plans when they placed him on the stretcher in the station at Baltimore. But he must have known all along that this was his last trip. People have a premonition about death, don't you know; even animals are supposed to know something about it, aren't they? As the ambulance people were carrying him off, he looked up to her and asked: "And what's your idea now, Helen?" She explained that they were going to have the doctors at Johns Hopkins look after his headaches to see what they could do for him. And after that was done, he would be free, all through with doctors, ambulances, and hospitals. He wouldn't even have to put up with anybody in the family. He could go where he pleased and do what he pleased. He said: "I have a different idea." "What's your idea, Tom darling?" He said, "I am very tired. I need a long rest."

Mama and the nurse were whisked off with him in the ambulance. She followed in a taxi with nine pieces of luggage. Sometimes, at a stop sign, the taxi would draw even with the ambulance. Now every moment of proximity counted a lifetime.

She stopped at a rooming house. She knew all the rooming houses in the neighborhood of the hospital. She had been here often many years ago, accompanying her father on his regular visits to Johns Hopkins for radium treatment against cancer. While she unscrambled the luggage from the taxi, she followed the ambulance with her eyes until it came to a stop at the receiving station.

She never used the rooms she had reserved for Mama, Luke—who had joined them in Baltimore—and herself, because she would not leave the hospital again until after he was dead.

AFTER this it was difficult to remember the sequence of events. It was just one long, agonizing nightmare. Tom didn't belong to them any more as he had in Seattle or on the trip across the country. Now he was completely in the hands of the doctors: the expert practitioners on human skulls. He was completely at the mercy of the hospital—and so were they: Mama, Luke, and herself. They had to do what they were told to do. There was a routine and order for everything—even for dying. It's a big hospital; it's a famous hospital; but it's a cold, inhuman place just the same. All hospitals are cold and inhuman, don't you think?

And then the doctors went to work on him. On Saturday, they drilled a hole into his skull in one of the oldest operations known to man. This was to give him relief from pressure until the second operation took place on Monday: the operation in which they would open his head and pass the verdict on life or death.

He had a beautiful big room downstairs on the third floor, full of light and flowers. But he never returned to it after Monday. After the second operation they wheeled him into a room on the same floor, the

seventh, where they kept all the brain cases. She would never forget the horrible sounds coming through the closed doors on the seventh floor, the terrifying groans of the brain cases, the pain, anguish, and suffering of these sick people, doomed, lost.

She did not leave the hospital during the last days from Monday to Thursday. The doctors urged her to get some rest, but she wouldn't leave the hospital. She wouldn't leave Tom now that the end was so near. So they gave her a blanket, and occasionally she slept curled up in a chair in his room or downstairs in the room he never used again. That's where Mama rested too during these last days. Only Luke would go across the street to sleep in the rooming house.

These were the days when the three of them fought bitterly, stubbornly for every inch of intimacy they could still share with the dying man who was their son and brother and who would always be their son and brother—long after the hospital or, for that matter, the world had closed the records on the "case" of Thomas Wolfe. They came to hate the hospital and its staff as if they were enemies. Yes, she fought bitterly: she flared up; she hurled insults; she disobeyed orders. It was a time when you didn't think much about good manners and etiquette, don't you know? She had to apologize to the doctor in charge when it was all over. She had been so bitter and hateful.

But then, they were cheated again: Mama, herself, the whole family. The doctor had promised her that Tom would live at least four or six weeks. Instead it was a matter of five or six days. Besides, he died alone. And that was perhaps the worst of it.

ON, how she remembered the last night and the morning of his death: Thursday morning. How could she ever forget! She had been sitting up, waiting downstairs, all night. Finally, when dawn came, she couldn't wait any longer. She sneaked upstairs and, unnoticed, slipped into the operating room. Of course, that was strictly against orders; but she didn't care, and nobody noticed her, don't you see?

Tom was lying on a table with doctors and nurses around him. When she looked at him, she knew. She knew that Tom was dying. His cheeks were flushed and red (they had always been ashen and pale); his eyes were closed; big needles were sticking in the veins of both arms; there was a deep gurgling sound in his throat; a nurse was swabbing it mechanically. Then she knew suddenly and with paralyzing horror that Tom was dying.

For this was different from what she had seen during the last few days. Sometimes the doctors had called her in to talk to Tom, to shout at him when he seemed to have lapsed into a coma in order to see whether or not he would still respond intelligibly. "Tom," she would shout, shaking him. Then louder and more horrified: "Tom, darling, answer me!" And he would reply calmly, almost as if annoyed by these constant disturbances: "Yes, Helen, what do you want?" Or, at other times, he would still talk to them from under the big helmet in which his head was now encased. "Mama," he would say pleading like a child, "Mama, I have been a bad boy, a very bad boy; all my life I have been a bad boy." And his mother would say firmly and somewhat reproachfully, "Now, Tom, you know you have never been a bad boy. Go and get some rest now." Or he would recount a dream he had had underneath his big helmet: how he had gone on a long ride into the country with his brother Luke in a big, black Cadillac, the girls they had picked up, the food they had eaten. . . .

But this morning he did not speak. There was only the gurgling sound in his throat; there were the doctors bending over him in silence; there was the nurse swabbing his throat; and, at the other end of the room, there was a group of internes standing around, talking casually about a party last night.

Then she knew. Holding her breath in unspeakable anguish, she knew that Tom was dying. A nurse looked up and recognized her: "Mrs. S., what are you doing here?" Then they wheeled the table into a

corner of the room. Somebody pushed a button; and a white curtain closed around the bed, silently, mechanically, shutting Tom off—forever. . . .

SHE didn't know what she was doing. She was panic-stricken. She ran out of the room, down the stairs, and through the corridors into the room where Mama was resting. She screamed: "He is dying, Mama. He is dying. They are not telling us; but he is dying. . . ."

Then out again and through the entrance hall of the building, where they have a huge statue of Jesus with the inscription: "Come unto me all ye who are burdened and heavy-laden. . . ."—across the street to fetch her brother Luke. Luke had locked himself in his room. She pounded the door frantically: "He's dying, Luke. Come out, he's dying." She repeated the words like an automaton.

He did not open the door, but spoke from the inside: "Oh Helen, pull yourself together. You have been singing his requiem for days, and he has been doing fine. This is the time to do something. Pray for him. Get down on your knees and pray." Then she realized that Luke did not want to believe her because he was praying—he was the only religious one in the family, don't you know? She was furious: "Open up, save your prayers for another day. They won't do him any good any more. He is dying, I am telling you. I know. I have seen him."

When Luke and she got back to the seventh floor, they met Mama supported by two nurses. She asked: "Mama, what's the matter?" And her mother replied feebly: "I don't know what's the matter, Helen." Then one of the nurses said, "He has been dead ten minutes." It was six o'clock in the morning.

She howled: "Why did you keep us away from him in his last moment?" The nurse said quietly: "But Mrs. S., you were in the room when he was gasping his last breath. Didn't you know he was dying?" Yes, she had known; she had known when she saw the white curtain closing around him for the last time.

AFTER they had bedded her mother down, she returned to the room in which her dead brother lay. She lifted him up. He was still warm. She removed the bandage from his head. She saw the small V-shaped incision at the back of his head. She was satisfied. It looked quite harmless: much more harmless than the big scar drawn across the top of his head by the beer mug at the carnival in Munich. But they had shaved off all his hair, the lovely, rich, black hair. She held him close, the heavy weight of her dead brother, remembering the days when she had held him as a baby, when he was hers in life as he was hers in death now. . . .

Mother was resting downstairs. She left the hospital with Luke. When they passed the statue of Jesus in the entrance hall, Luke raised his fist threateningly and muttered a curse. "You let me down. . . ." That was Luke, the religious one.

She hardly noticed Luke by her side. All she remembered was the rage burning inside her body, and the hate welling up from inside until she was consumed by it and she saw, thought, and breathed nothing but hate. She hated the sun in the sky; she hated the people in the streets, passing by as if nothing had happened; she hated the doctors who had killed him; she hated the prayers Luke had wasted; she hated God and man: she hated everything under the sun; for he was dead—Tom, honey, baby, darling. . . .

She saw his death staring at her from the front pages of the early afternoon editions of the newspaper. And she thought it was all wrong. She thought that any minute now she would wake up and know that it was nothing but a nightmare.

They stayed until Friday night, Mama, Luke, and herself; for they couldn't get a casket big enough for Tom, neither in Baltimore nor in New York. Such was the size of the man. Finally, an old Italian undertaker—he gave them real solace, too—made a special casket big enough for the enormous body of the dead man, their son and brother, and they buried him entombed in steel and in the sorrow of their hearts.

NEXT OF KIN

A Story

EDGAR ROSENBERG

THE day after we left Antwerp on the "Germania," one of the crew—I had never seen him nor did I ever discover his name—a young sailor, a mere boy, barely twenty years old, died quite suddenly. It was a case of blood poisoning, the refugees said; during a sharp-shooting match on the green at home a fragment of lead had lodged somewhere inside him and he had neglected to report the injury at the time. When the captain finally found out about it, he was furious, gave the poor boy a terrible dressing down and told him never to let it happen again. And now he was dead! Mizzie Maienthau claimed that she had seen the boy around the ship and spoken to him; a very nice lad he was, too, with nice brown eyes and good teeth; but, confidentially, she didn't in the least believe that cock-and-bull story about the fragment of lead, though she was quite willing to credit the part about the bad blood. If that merry, good-for-nothing sailor lad failed to go straight to the captain after contracting whatever it was he suffered from, and on top of that kept it hushed up for half a year, he himself undoubtedly best knew why and what, Mizzie dared say. Far be it from her to poke her nose into their *goyish* affairs. . . .

The nameless sailor was buried at sea. He was buried at sea even though sea burials had long ago gone out of fashion. As Konrad Konradi, the dentist, informed us, it was cus-

tomary nowadays to put the bodies on ice, ship them home to the loved ones, and lay them at rest the regular way. But in the first place the sailor who died on the "Germania" had no family to claim him; he was quite a lonely fellow; according to Mizzie he had been raised in an orphanage and before that he had been a foundling; oh, she could tell us stories about that, too. And besides, on such uncommonly long trips as the "Germania" undertook then, it would have been fearfully awkward to keep a body stored below deck all the way, and then the refrigeration facilities on board were shockingly inadequate. And so the sailor was to have the wide ocean for his grave.

The passengers had been told that they might attend the services if they cared to, and with the exception of the poet Geron Gruenschnabel, the lonely, seasick recollector of his past, the daring disciple of Tchames Tchoice, they all showed up. For that matter, Herr Gruenschnabel had no excuse whatever to remain locked up in his cabin this time, unless he was engaged in the destruction of language barriers again. He could not very well be seasick for the simple reason that the "Germania" was lying quite still in mid-ocean. Dr. Konradi said it was some kind of international regulation that you could not have a sea burial while the ship was going full blast. He imagined they did it as a formal tribute to the deceased, though, personally, he could not for the life of him see what difference it made to the "object in question" whether the boat was moving or standing still while they dumped it overboard. If a thing like that should ever happen to him, he would just as soon have them heave him into the water without all this unnecessary pother which cost the shipping company a small fortune. Not that he cared a straw for the shipping company's bank account; for all

EDGAR ROSENBERG was born in Germany in 1925, came to the United States in 1940, and served with the United States Army in the European theater. He received his master's degree from Cornell University, and has published short stories in various literary magazines. The story published here is an episode taken from a novel in progress; an earlier short story by Mr. Rosenberg, "The Happy One," appeared in the June 1949 COMMENTARY.

the difference it made to him, they could go bankrupt the minute they'd put him ashore at Santo Domingo; but it was just a matter of principle. Kommerzienrat Krautheimer, who had shown signs of growing vexation at Dr. Konradi's frivolous and irreverent way of speaking about the dead, begged to call his attention to a slightly absurd paradox in his comments: his assumption that he would be safely put ashore precluded, did it not, the possibility of his being buried at sea first? Or, he asked Dr. Konradi sardonically, had his thoughtless friend already purchased a round-trip ticket and on the way back expected to—ahem, etc. etc.? Dr. Konradi replied without guile that he had not purchased a round-trip ticket.

THE services for the dead sailor took place directly after breakfast, a very good and filling breakfast consisting of omelettes, hot waffles, and fried pork sausages. It had drizzled all morning, a dull, steady, enervating drizzle, so that most of the passengers came in raincoats and galoshes. Because of the rain and the regulations and the expense involved in stopping all that machinery in the middle of the Atlantic the services were surprisingly short; before you knew it, it was all finished and we were back in the lounge, talking it over. For, after all, whichever way you looked at it, none of us had ever witnessed a sea burial; in fact, I'd never even been to a regular funeral.

Some sixty of us, including the crew, were assembled on deck, grouped in a disorderly semicircle around a long, black, rectangular object which Dr. Konradi merely identified as the board. "This is the board," he whispered and pointed, and everybody looked earnestly at the board. After we had stared at it for a while to guess its secret, the coffin containing the dead sailor with the piece of lead inside him was carried on-stage on the shoulders of eight of the dead man's shipmates. It was a simple black coffin without inscription or ornament; it made me think of the way the old Egyptians used to bury their kin, how ever so much more nobly they treated their dead, and what a shame it was after

all that everything was so cut and dried and no nonsense about it nowadays. But the swastika flag was draped over the top of the coffin, and it made all the difference: the whole ceremony at once looked brighter and more cheerful all around, and more solemn, too. Our only Aryan, Ecclesiastical Councillor Wenzeslas Heidenstamm, representing the Church Militant, could not conceal a certain amount of stoic satisfaction at the sight of the flag, and for once failed to wither under the dentist's hypodermic glance. His conscience was clear and pure his heart.

Which was no reason why his pathologically lipsticked wife had to sniffle so. For Frau Hulda Heidenstamm had of late become the victim of a vicious slander. It was whispered of her that by no means was she all purity and popery: somewhere along the line her family tree did not bear too close a scrutiny, witness certain violent gestures of the hand, certain mannerisms of speech, a way she had of saying *oi* and *nu*. Her maiden name, too, was Gassenweiler, or Weilengasser, which, though it did not positively brand her as a *shochet's* daughter, at least rendered her open to suspicion. But she sniffed and sniffled all the same, and audibly dispensed her usual number of literally translated French commentaries. "*Ah mon cher Dieu,*" she was heard to sniffle, "*comme très terrible,*" and "*tel un pauvre diable, Wenzl. Tout terrible, faut je dire.*" . . .

NOW the pallbearers carefully lowered the coffin onto the board, saluted briefly, whereupon the little captain, Captain Wehrauch, stepped up to the coffin, likewise saluted, and then he pulled a prayer book out of his pocket in a terribly jerky motion, as though he were doing a present-arms. Then the little captain spoke a prayer, an amazingly brief prayer, moreover; I didn't know they came that brief. And furthermore he spoke it utterly without feeling, or at any rate with the wrong feeling, not a bit sincerely or devoutly, but sort of barking the words at the coffin in short, angry bursts; perhaps he was still annoyed with the dead sailor for not having reported his piece of lead

in time and so saved himself the trouble of having to be buried now in the middle of nowhere.

The little captain closed the prayer book, slammed it shut, rather, slipped it back into his pocket like an unwanted thing, and barked some command at nobody in particular; the eight pallbearers lifted the board with the coffin on it and placed it at an angle on the railing; the captain barked another syllable or two, impossible to make them out, though from the way he barked them they sounded like nothing so much as "Heave him in, boys!" They did not directly heave him in, however; they stuck their heads together and whispered a few words, perhaps agreeing on a signal to get the timing right; the man in charge nodded his head like a pianist giving the cue to turn the page; and then, holding on to the board and the flag, they let go of the coffin. But now it turned out that the coffin refused to move, so that the man who had just nodded his head to no effect had to give it an extra little push—and now, now at last, the coffin slid from the board and into the ocean. Plop!—and it was gone, and the waves had swallowed up the dead sailor, the poor, homeless sailor with the fatal piece of lead in his bones.

THE captain snorted something to the assembled crew and, putting his cap on again, he strutted away, his Vandyke bristling with agnostic scorn. Everybody stood around, waiting for him to come back for another prayer or a hymn, "*Ein' feste Burg*" or "*Wir treten zum Beten*," or "*Die Fahne hoch*." But no sooner was he out of sight than the engines started up again and in another three minutes we were on our way. What a surprise! . . . Mizzie Maienthau was appalled at the lack of feeling these people showed; was it their seafaring life that did it, or their Protestantism? Councilor of Commerce Krautheimer informed us that the admittedly shocking manner in which the entire ceremony had been conducted placed him in an equivocal position. On one hand, his inherited principles forbade him to have any sympathy with the deceased and all he stood for; on the

other hand, acting on older and more humane canons which he espoused, he could not but deplore the want of respect evident in the funeral services, that measure of respect to which every human being, *qua* human being, was surely entitled. Two souls, alas, dwelled in his breast, Herr Krautheimer sadly informed us; and then he lost himself in general remarks touching the human spirit and its difficult status in an age of vandalism. . . . Mizzie asked Dr. Konradi how long it would take until the coffin sank to the bottom of the deep. Dr. Konradi replied that he had never been asked such a silly question, for any child could see that the ocean was not uniformly deep and secondly not all coffins might be uniformly weighted. He was not sure of the second point, however, and promised Mizzie to look it up for her. . . .

Three sailors stood by the railing, oblivious of the unabating drizzle. The youngest of them began to whistle "*Ich hatt' einen Kameraden*," but he must have realized what an unsailorlike thing he was doing, for he stopped abruptly in the middle of it and passed on to a popular tune, the moral of which was that everything is much more bearable if you just keep your sense of humor. "*Mit Humor, mit Humor, kommt mir alles leichter vor*," whistled the young sailor. His shipmates pretended not to notice his embarrassment, and perhaps they really didn't. And then they, too, went away.

And that was how they buried the sailor of the "*Germania*." A disappointing and unimaginative performance, all the drabber in the steady drizzle and the chilling grayness of the forenoon. Of course, there was the flag. . . . And yet, it was more than the mere sight of the flag which gave matter for thought for many hours and days. It must have been, I think, what the Councilor of Commerce meant when he talked about the Idea. The Idea was one of his most consoling expressions and he availed himself of it whenever he ran out of richly annotated recollections, specific threats, and pinioned albeit clipped phrases from *Don Carlos*, *Faust I*, Emmanuel Geibel, and Mr. Shelley the English poet. After a while I concluded that the

Idea before me now would have to be formulated somewhat as follows: in looking on the coffin of the poisoned sailor I had looked once more on the Fatherland, and who could say when I should ever look on it with the same eyes again? The burial of the sailor called for some positive decision, called for it at once, as long as I found myself in a borderline position with respect to my age and my location on board a ship headed for a spot three thousand miles away, and with respect to what I knew had happened back home and what I didn't know and what I didn't want to know. On the whole, I was rather annoyed with the sailor for dying just then, as though deliberately and maliciously provoking the issue.

WHEN the passengers of the "Germania" were told to dismiss overnight, not only their homeland, but each dear and good native routine of their lives, Dr. Konradi was seventy-five years old; Councilor Krautheimer was close to sixty; and I was thirteen. Yet to me, who never learned to write fine sentences in my language, who lacked a thousand associations which would trouble the others the rest of their days, who had never received from the state such tokens of homage as made the leavetaking all the more criminal—to me, this sudden atmospheric change meant no less than it meant to those on whose faces its effects were already ineradicably engraved. For I, too, had taken the oath of service. I, too, knew the Fatherland, knew it better than they did, and certainly I knew it better than they now because now they were all angry. Oh, how they had read their newspapers all right; Councilor Krautheimer, ensconced in an armchair far too big for him, took off his pince-nez one summer evening five years ago, looked up from the *Courier* and addressed himself to his family in the following terms:

"Here's a communiqué from that insufferable medicaster Sauerbruch. It looks as though the old man is headed for Valhalla any day now. Na, na, na. And Papen, I assure you, won't lift a finger after the Tegernsee fiasco, *Das eben ist der Fluch der boesen Tat, und so weiter. Le président est mort, vive l'anarchie; mark my words!*"

But I who read the same notice in the papers saw:

The passing of a mighty warrior, mighty in battle and in diplomacy, an ancient man with snow-white hair and the eyes of a tired prophet, propped up on his eider-down pillows with the emblem of his clan embroidered in purple and gold: Reichspräsident Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg,

*Our Hindenburg, that brave old cuss,
The Russian's scourge, Death of the Russ,*

lay dying himself in the far north; he faced death, as he had faced him in combat a thousand times, unflinching, and bade him do his worst and only be quick about it. Gathered around his canopy were his ministers of state, his vice chancellor at his left, his chancellor and greater second at his right, Herr Hugenberg at his back, as their dying chief placed into their hands the fortunes of the Fatherland, cautioning them of Eastern cunning and Western currency, commending them to the good will of the Roman Duce, bidding them be wary of Comrade Trotsky, wherever that Bolshevik fellow might be hiding out. (Oskar, young Hindenburg, was mixing medicine in the next room.)

"And who shall be your successor?" in measured tones asked his vice chancellor, Franz Freiherr von Papen. He wore a black silk hat and a light gray Bond Street suit of breath-taking beauty. "I know it's rude of me to bring it up, sir, but who shall be Reichspräsident after you're . . . uh. . . ."

"You don't have to mince your words with me, Franzl," Hindenburg chuckled; "you mean after I'm dead as a doornail, don't you?"

"Yes sir," said Franz Freiherr von Papen, and words cannot describe the elegance of his white buckskins on the heavy carpet of deep, luxuriant mauve. "Who'll it be, Hitler or me?"

"The best!" replied Hindenburg, and his voice rang out, the same voice which twenty years before had given the command "Charge!" at the Masurian Lakes. "The best!" And he fell back on his pillow, his eider-down pillow of purple and gold.

"Dead as a doornail," said Franzl Freiherr von Papen, taking the old man's wrist and feeling his pulse to make sure. "You better call Oskar."

"There was a grand old man for you," mumbled Herr Hugenberg while the Freiherr gripped his hand.

"A gentleman of the old school," said Freiherr von Papen.

"We shall not be the same without him," Herr Hugenberg rejoined.

Neither noticed that in the corner all by himself the new young chancellor was bitterly crying for his dead leader. . . .

I was nine and on excellent terms with myself. I had been reading the newspapers with care for two years.

BRUENING fell: I was seven.

After the Easter recess, our section was divided into three unequal groups twice a week. Twice a week four of us walked along a dark, damp, subterranean corridor to a lecture room in the annex where boys from the other public schools in town came together to hear Cantor Goldwasser tell us stories from the Bible. "And Job's latter end was more greatly blessed than his beginning," Cantor Goldwasser might say, and he went on to compute just how greatly blessed Job's latter end really was: so and so many cows, so and so many sheep, several hundred oxen, a few dozen servants; also: sons and daughters. Why the sons and daughters came after the sheep and the oxen, Cantor Goldwasser would not say. And I made a list of Job's property and decided to add up all the items some day and perhaps I could prevail on the Cantor to have the total amount included in future editions of the Bible.

The name of the subject was "Religion," and it was by all odds the most thrilling subject in the world. And the best part about it was that there were only the four of us in the group from our section, which was far and away the smallest group of the three. The other two consisted of seventeen and twenty-two boys, respectively; I counted them at least twice. How sorry I felt for those willy-nilly seventeen and those pitifully ordinary

twenty-two; not for anything in the world would I have been one of them, even if the twenty-two didn't have to walk along a bad-smelling corridor but could stay right where they were and the seventeen only had to walk down one flight of stairs. What I positively did not understand was why such a lazy good-for-nothing as Benno Blumenkohl had to be in our group; he came to school whenever he had nothing better to do and his report cards were so awful that Rector Falkenhayn himself had to write Benno's father a letter about it.

To be sure, Cantor Goldwasser did not always tell us stories from the Bible; sometimes he spoke about quite general things, more difficult to grasp and not terribly exciting either. In one of his earliest talks, for example, after he had told us about Adam and Eve and the talking rattlesnake, he said we were all descended from Adam and furthermore we were all Israelites, although he did not make it at all clear whether being an Israelite had anything to do with the descent from Adam. Just before the bell rang, Cantor Goldwasser boomed: "Any questions!" Though his voice was deep, loud, and terrible, and marvelously attuned to the dispensation of militant messages in vasty deserts, he impressed nobody; his black beetle brows availed him nothing. His threats were totally empty; and besides he had a strawberry-looking nose which compelled mirth. He had a good deal of difficulty making himself understood; his speech was telegraphic, repetitious, and awkwardly punctuated, and he had a way of winding up his unwritten paragraphs by roaring out a conclusive monosyllable such as "Quite!" or "Right!" or "Ah." Sometimes he gave the wrong answers with such a display of confusion and impatience that he had no business inviting questions to begin with.

Up shot Oswald Oppenheimer's hand. He most certainly would like to ask a question, cried Oswald Oppenheimer. Had he understood the Cantor correctly to say that when God called on Adam, Adam had answered with the words: "Here I am, God?" Yes, certainly, that was so, quite, Cantor Goldwasser

agreed, and he inclined his massive head as much as to ask "What then?" Well, Oswald Oppenheimer cried, begging the Herr Cantor's pardon, he could never believe that. He happened to know that Germany was only about seventy years old; as a matter of fact, it was the Prince Otto von Bismarck who had discovered it, and if, as the Cantor had just got through telling them, Adam lived more than a hundred years ago, how could he possibly speak any German and say, "Hier, Herrgott, da bin ich." Cantor Goldwasser said "Ah" and placed his index finger at the wing of his nose, pretending to think it over, for he had no idea whether Oswald Oppenheimer was serious. Nor was Oswald interested in an explanation; he sat back in his seat with an air of mischief and satisfaction at having trapped the Cantor and displayed his own historical information into the bargain.

And then the freckled Fritz Musliner wanted to know why Adam and Eve were ashamed to look at each other after they had eaten of the apple. At that Benno Blumenkohl began to snicker and poke me in the ribs. For some reason, this question confounded the poor Cantor more than anything; he quite blushed, went "Ahem," and finally, speaking very hurriedly, as though anxious to get the answer over and done with, he said:

"They were ashamed, yes certainly, because they had done—ah—wrong. In the eyes of God, to be sure. Wrong!"

But now Benno Blumenkohl could contain himself no longer and to everybody's delight blurted out the question whether it was true that Adam and Eve walked around stark naked even in the wintertime. And he looked triumphantly around the class, staring at everyone in turn to assure himself twenty times over that his question (which was not, of course, meant to be a question at all) had made the proper impression. But before Cantor Goldwasser could either quiet the excited whispers or answer Benno's sensational charge, the bell rang, and vaguely promising Benno satisfaction at our next meeting, the Cantor boomed our dismissal.

While the boys filed out of the room, still whispering, still snickering, I remained behind and pretended to busy myself with my notebooks in order to allow the Cantor time to recover from Benno's blow and to get over his speechlessness. At length I asked him:

"How many Israelites are there in the world?"

Cantor Goldwasser glanced at me from beneath his futile beetle brows, glared at me, full of suspicion and spite, very justified after the affair with Benno, and he muttered humorlessly, "Ah—a Talmudic question, hah!" Perceiving then that I had no audience to entertain, he softened:

"Very many—oh, quite a few. To be sure. Hundreds!"

My face fell noticeably; I hesitated a moment, then demanded:

"Are there more Israelites than other people?"

"More?" repeated the Cantor, dumbfounded. "Ah no. Certainly not. In fact—no. There are more other people, many more. Right!"

"More than a hundred more?" I asked.

"*Ai, ai, ai*," boomed Cantor Goldwasser, "a Talmudic question. A hundred? More. My friend: more than a hundred times a hundred. Check?"

In order to cover up the confusion I, in my turn, felt at the expression "a hundred times a hundred," I passed on to something else.

"Cantor Goldwasser," I inquired, "is the Fuehrer an Israelite?"

"Ach," went the Cantor and he shooed me away with his handkerchief. "Shoo shoo—away—*Wiedersehen—Mahlzeit—Merry Christmas*," and he got up to go. (He actually said "Merry Christmas.") But I simply stood there; and when he had assured himself that I was still in earnest, he said "*ai, ai*" again and, quite overcome, slumped back into his chair. He stared out of the window for fully a minute, his bushy brows contracted again, and two vertical folds engraved themselves over his strawberry nose. And finally, speaking quite softly but with a touch of vehemence, too, a touch, almost, of wrath, he said:

"No. Certainly not. Israelite? I should say not. No!"

THE Reichstag burned; I was eight. The purifying fire, Marshal Goering's fine and caustic phrases in the press having brought home to me once more the extraordinary goodness of being eight years old and an Israelite in the Fatherland, I delivered myself of the following prayer before going to sleep:

"Dear God! Thank you very much for everything. Thank you for making me an Israelite of which I am very proud. Watch over myself, the Fuehrer, Mama, Papa, Reichsminister fuer Luftschutz Hermann Goering and wife Emma, Reichsminister fuer Propaganda und oeffentliche Aufklaerung Doktor Paul Joseph Goebbels and wife Magda as well as five adopted children all beginning with an H, Reichsinnenminister Wilhelm Frick, Reichsaussenminister Konstantin Baron or Freiherr or both von Neurath, my grandmother, Reichsminister der SS Heinrich Himmler, my brother, Buergermeister Jakob, Kantor Goldwasser, Gauleiter Julius Streicher, Staatschef des deutschen Heeres General Walter Erich von Blomberg, Reichspraesident Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg, Generalfeldmarschall von Mackensen, Staatschef der SA Ernst Roehm, Parteigenosse Rudolph Hess and his shrew of a wife, and all the students from Blutharsch to Wunderlich. Also Benno Blumenkohl. Also Minister for Blood and Honor namesake Alfred Rosenberg. Also the lamented Reichspraesident Ebert, the self-made reactionary. Amen."

I wondered whether I should include the Prince von Bismarck but decided that that would carry me too far afield, for then I should have to pray for a number of other people as well, the Old Fritz, and Siegfried the Dragon Slayer and wife Kriemhilde and Wotan and Moses and Shem, Ham, and Japhet and Kaiser Wilhelm in Holland.

The minor formulae out of the way, I passed on to a very specific request which had been on my conscience ever since Kantor Goldwasser had broached the subject the day before, though it had slipped my mind in the heat of the Reichstag fire. I prayed:

"Dear God! *Boruch atoh adonoi elohenu* (this was calculated appeasement). God, if you haven't picked out the Messiah yet, I wonder if I could be him. I should be very glad to have the job and I promise to do everything I can. I mean as long as it makes no difference. I have very good grades, I have a one in Conduct and a two in Effort, and the only one in the class who's got better marks is Ewald Emeran von Salm and he isn't an Israelite but believes in popes and your mother if you got one, and besides his parents are Roman, so he's out. Besides my father and mother would be very proud, also my grandmother. Also my brother would behave more. Amen."

And then something else occurred to me, a real stroke of genius:

"Dear God! I have an idea. If you do it, I'll fast and I'll never touch another slice of ham, so help me, and ham is my favorite dish and it's good for me. Would it make any difference to you if I appointed Reichsfuehrer Adolf Hitler as my assistant once I got the job? Do I have to be dead first? I know he isn't an Israelite but he's so much of everything else, I don't think you could find a better man. Except maybe the saints. As a matter of fact, I'd as soon you'd make the both of us Messiahs; it's a nicer arrangement all around and instead of having one Messiah, you'd have two and could get twice as much work done. The Fuehrer and I would be more like brothers. . . ."

ROEHM (Staatschef der SA Ernst) was dead; Dollfuss (Bundeskanzler Engelbert) died; the old man died: I was nine. When I was ten the Saar came home.

I discovered one evening that I couldn't raise my big toe up to my mouth any more. What a shock! I hadn't tried it for a year and a half now, all of a sudden, I couldn't do it any more. Of course now I could stand on my head and on my hands, too, and walk across half the room that way, but that was no consolation at all.

But next day I found out something incomparably more thrilling than the toe game and all the head stands that I used to think so wonderful when I was a stupid little boy.

What I discovered when I was ten years old was this: if you isolate a sentence and make a separate paragraph out of it, the sentence looks much more striking and important than if it were stuck in a paragraph with a lot of other sentences around it. Thus:

"The Fuehrer was born on April 20, 1889 at Braunau near Linz in Austria's proud estate/in Victory and Honor great. His father, Herr Alois Hitler, was nothing but a postoffice man. His mother was a housewife and poor as a church mouse on her father's side. The Fuehrer was a self-made individuum. The Fuehrer was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, emphatically not. The Fuehrer was the only boy, but they did not spare the rod and spoil the child. Herr and Frau Hitler had a little cottage, a cow for milk, two pigs, also a son, the Fuehrer, and a daughter, Frau Raupal, the former Fräulein Hitler, she married a certain Raupal, beyond her station. It was a love match. The Fuehrer said: never mind the gossips. When the Fuehrer was still a schoolboy Herr Alois breathed his last. One fine morning Frau Hitler shouted, Alois, Alois, breakfast. But he didn't answer. Because he was dead. There could be no doubt about it: he was dead as a doornail. Mind: there's nothing so dead about a doornail that a coffin nail isn't deader, but the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile."

And then the clinching sentence: "Herr Alois was dead."

It had taken me fully two hours to compose the initial passage of the biography and since I had made the mistake of incorporating the crucial "Herr Alois was dead" in the opening paragraph on my first draft (the discovery not having struck me at the time) I had to rewrite the whole thing. After that, the writing went much more smoothly. The biography was simply entitled: "FUEHRER." Just "Fuehrer"; not even "The Fuehrer." But it had a subtitle, too: "His Life, his Work, his World, his Mission" and was inscribed "In deep humility and admiration to our beloved Fuehrer and every true son of the nation whithersoever the wind bloweth them. In humble token, the Author."

Now that the discovery was made, it remained only to be applied as liberally as possible. I continued where I had left off:

"And then Frau Hitler died too. Of a heart murmur, with complications.

"The Fuehrer was all alone.

"The Fuehrer was a double orphan because his father was dead and so was his mother.

"The Fuehrer would have given his right hand if he could have cried, but it wasn't heroic. So he didn't.

"He just swallowed it."

But now, having said everything there was to be said on the subject of the Fuehrer's "Parentage and Preliminaries" (this the title of Chapter I) I reached an awkward impasse. How could I bridge his childhood days and his service as a corporal in the war knowing, as I did, next to nothing about the intervening years? Finally I decided I had better begin a new chapter. I rounded off the first with a nice concluding paragraph, not forgetting the moral either:

"And thus we can see that the Fuehrer had a miserable childhood, but he never took it out on anybody afterwards.

"Heaven helps those who help themselves.

"*Sich wehren ist ehren.*"

And, turning to a fresh page, I printed at the top in thick black letters: "THE WAR YEARS."

WE SMOTE the French on the river Rhine; we flew flags over Austria's proud estate/in Victory and Honor great. Impressive dignitaries came and went. A tall, aged marshal from Hungary with a face like a mask arrived. Next came a sinister, one-eyed Bohemian priest. Came an English milord with a bowler hat and a scrawny neck and long black tails down his back. The man from France came with him, and the Roman friend. . . .

During the long winter evenings I assessed my property. 3,249 stamps, not counting the duplications. I said:

"3,249. 8 Vatican, 14 Thurn-und-Taxis, 11 Spain Offices in Morocco. . . ."

"Any stamps from Haiti?" asked my uncle.

"No," I said. "Who's going to Haiti?" It was a perfectly sensible question to ask, for every day now someone was going away to the most outlandish places.

"We are," said my mother.

"Oh," I said, "all the way to Haiti."

For five weeks I confused it with Hawaii; then it occurred to me to look it up in the atlas and I discovered my mistake. What a queer shape it had, quite like a turtle. Its color in the atlas was maroon and the Dominican Republic next to it was yellow, the whole against a background of light blue for the Caribbean. It looked very nice. . . .

We missed our first boat to Haiti, and our second. But in April the prefect of police said, "Now I'll let you go." And one fine day two weeks later, on an afternoon in May, I slid for the last time down the bannister of our house on the Market Square, our gray, three-story house with its musty odor of honorable old age and the name of our family emblazoned in gold over the entrance. It was, I remember it distinctly, a singularly warm and sunny day for May; the gabled roofs and steeples of the town were beautiful in the soft light of the late afternoon; and in front of the house two baby nurses pushed their perambulators to and fro and talked about a recipe for potato dumplings.

"Did you ever try to put garlic in it?" asked one.

"No, I never," replied the other. "The missus would kill me. Why, only the other day she says to me, 'Martha. . . .' " But the wind gently wafted Martha's grievance out of my hearing and I was saddened by the broken confession. . . . When we crossed the Marktplatz the Widow Tuffenzahm, done up in black tulle, came out of her pastry shop to wish us well. She remembered my great-grandfather, may his soul rest in peace, and as a little girl she had known my great-great-grandfather, too, such a gentleman; yes, indeed, all five generations she'd known; and she delicately touched her eyes with the corner of her black handkerchief, with her free hand blindly groping for three peppermint sticks in her bag, for the journey. . . .

On the twenty-first of May we embarked.

THESE and similar thoughts passed through my mind (the sailor having entered upon his journey beneath the waves and the passengers retired to the lounge for a brief exchange of opinions). They passed through my mind on the morning and afternoon of the day they buried the sailor; and for many long afternoons now, the ritual of the flag having given their recurrence fresh impetus, they would return helter-skelter at odd moments; unbidden and unwanted they came to tease and trouble me, and there was no stopping them at all. For here now is a test case: there is the banner, there is the sailor; take them or leave them. Oh, but the decision was so difficult; the old physician Hippocrates had found such a neat sentence to wrap up the whole incident: Art is long, that did not apply; Life is short, that was nonsense, at thirteen that was simply cant; but his other three verities were fine things, absolutely justified by the contingencies. . . . And finally the decision, the difficult decision that was not to be trifled with for trifling was perilous—this decision, it was forced upon me, not by some chance occurrence that now came to pass, not by some supernal omen to light the dumb quester, but quite simply by the thirteen years that had gone before and my fine memory for them and my uncanny imagination for the rest.

Reader, I pitied him. I pitied the dead sailor whose life was indeed so very short but who of Art knew nothing and died before Decision was thrust upon him. I had never seen him; I did not know his name, his first nor his last, but he was young at death; matter enough for pity. Perhaps my frail shadow had once fallen across his way and though I was ignorant of our meeting, he had known me then, and perhaps our encounter had induced in him some pleasant reactions, started him upon some pleasing train of thought or moved him to repentance; it might have; who could say? And in the light of our maybe-meeting, who will presume to say whether his death was just or not?

The Councilor of Commerce would presume.

Oh bold and happy arbiter! The decision

is so simple for him, so self-evident; what need is there of dangerous experiments to one so wise and bold? To him memory serves to obviate scruples, to obviate the gloss and varnish of bad conscience. "One less." Such is the Councilor's bold, pitiless decision: "One less!"

He does not imply one "sailor" less, one whose eyes have looked upon my shadow on the boards, but one less agent of some deplorable mischance, nothing carnal, nothing flesh and blood about it, a symbol, and good riddance to it. . . . The Councilor, he had it easy; the issue was so clear-cut whichever way he looked at it. Even if there had been no circumstances to rob the sailor of his last shreds of identity, what did a sailor ever mean to such a one as a Councilor of Commerce? A nothing. A person without status, a ruffian by definition and by office, a servitor, a purveyor of conveniences appointed for his, this Councilor's sake: here was Herr Krautheimer: he had to go on a little trip (not this trip, of course, any trip in the last thirty-five years); he paid his fare on such-and-such a

boat; here was the sailor, paid to see to it that the Councilor landed safely wherever he was minded to land and that he got there without a hitch at a decent mileage: such was their relationship long before the old man was headed for Valhalla. The Councilor would not in any case have eaten or drunk or prayed with the sailor; he would not have talked or walked with him either, and their transactions were carefully screened and carefully channeled, for the age had outlawed hand-to-hand deals in simulated streets before Terentian edifices.

No sooner were we on our way again than Herr Kommerzienrat Krautheimer, in the highest of spirits, slapped my father on the back and with a rueful smile, he shouted:

"Na, Herr Doktor, what's new on the Bourse?"

Ecclesiastical Councilor Wenzeslas Heidenstamm walked by us with a sidelong glance and a sheepish grin; excluded from the general jollity, condemned to remain an outsider for three more weeks, he slunk past us: a fawning publican.

FROM THE AMERICAN SCENE

JEWISH EDITOR: FRONTIER STYLE

"The Voice" Supplies a Voice for the Wilderness

BEN LAPPIN

ON WEDNESDAY afternoons, when the stores in the small towns of Ontario are closed down and the businessmen come into Toronto on their buying trips, one is likely to find several out-of-town shopkeepers milling about the office of Mr. Joshua Simon, editor and publisher of the *Canader Shtimme*, or *The Voice*, as the name reads on the English page. The nature of their missions is varied: one of the pilgrims might be interviewing a combined rabbi-teacher-cantor-*shochet-mohel* on behalf of his tiny locality in Northern Ontario; another might be laboring away on the words of an advertisement seeking board and lodging with a congenial family for his young daughter who is arriving in the city to enter the University of Toronto; still another may be a widower biding his time for a chance to discuss with Mr. Simon the possibility of finding an older girl or a young widow who would consider marriage and settling in some remote community.

ACCORDING to legend, the small-town American editor must be the master of all trades, crafts, arts, and professions, handling everything from the recovery of lost cows to the mending of broken marriages. From this sketch of the editor of the Yiddish-language *Canader Shtimme* of Toronto, it is clear that the editor of a Jewish paper must perform all such functions—and serve heaven, too. BEN LAPPIN is now executive director of the central region of the American Jewish Congress. He was born in Kielce, Poland, in 1916 and emigrated to Canada with his family at the age of eight. He is a graduate of the School of Social Work of the University of Toronto, and writes articles, stories, and radio plays.

To see Mr. Simon is a very uncomplicated matter. One simply barges into his office. That's how he likes it. And although this has a tendency to make his large office look like the lobby of some unruly convention, Mr. Simon moves through the milling throng with great effectiveness. He places his visitors in different parts of the room and flits from corner to corner, carrying on conversation in a kind of subdued mumble which insures a measure of privacy without stifling any of the genuine warmth of a personal discussion.

"Appointments you make with social workers," he says with affected abruptness to those astonished at the easy access they have to the editor and publisher of the *Voice*. Mr. Simon never wastes an opportunity to take a dig at the social-work profession, a calling that has over the years provoked a steady jet of captious editorials from his pen (many of which I translated for the English page when I worked for the *Voice*). Nothing can dissuade him from the view that the Jews of America are handing over Jewish survival itself to a civil service. Jewish life, according to the Simon thesis, depends on every Jew's doing the Good Deed himself. "No man can delegate his *mitzvah* to a professional," he has thundered time and again for upwards of thirty years. And to those who maintain that he harbors outmoded notions about social work, Mr. Simon retorts that he spent the winter of 1907 in Siberia for his advanced ideas.

The comings and goings in his office Mr. Simon sees as the embodiment of his philosophy. As a matter of fact, most of the problems brought to Mr. Simon by the out-of-

town folks (and by the local people, for that matter) have little to do with his work as editor or publisher. But that he should refer these people and their troubles to community agencies and their "push-button" Jews? Never! "You don't have to have any fancy diplomas to be an expert; all you got to do is believe that every Jew is his brother's keeper." Whether this theory is borne out by his experience is debatable. But one thing is certain, and that is that the *Voice* has been host these past thirty years to a highly entertaining variety of bedlam and that its editor and publisher is a colorful gentleman with a knack for getting himself involved in some highly bizarre episodes.

I DON'T know how high the incident with the Jewish community of Porcupine rates among Mr. Simon's escapades, but I can record it in every detail, having been more than slightly involved in it myself. The Porcupine affair dates back to the early fall of 1935 in the days when there were no cold wars, no hot wars; in fact, hardly anything to worry about—except the depression.

At that time I was editor of the English page of the *Voice*. I was also proofreader, layout man, dispatcher, and business assistant to Miss Kopstick, the office manager or "bookkeeper" as she was called by the rest of the staff. Quite the most grueling of all my responsibilities, this last chore involved my taking ads after Miss Kopstick had left for the day. Prospective advertisers often came bearing virtual essays in flamboyant Yiddish, telling the world that they had rooms to let, or used bicycles or baby carriages, or one of a thousand other items for sale. My efforts to condense the copy to the size of a dollar classified ad were always hotly contested. The argument *contra* would generally run along these lines: "What will it hurt you if the advertisement has a few more words? Will it break down the presses? Will the *Voice* go out of business?" Of no avail were explanations about space rates. And often as not these disputes would wind up with accusations that I was an assimilationist undermining *dos Yiddishe vort* in America. When things would get too trying, I'd ask Mr. Simon to relieve me of some of my various jobs. For an answer he'd point vaguely in the direction of the street and say: "The depression is the boss; go talk to

the depression." This simple reply managed to personalize the lean 30's for me so dramatically that to this day the vision of a fierce, bony, old *melamed* perched on the threshold of the *Voice* still leaps into my mind when I think of the depression.

In those days Mr. Simon would go to New York once a year. The week among the big-time Yiddish writers would refresh his spirit. Back in Toronto he'd relive in every detail the nights spent at the Café Royale with the great and near-great of Yiddish literature. Sometimes he'd produce the manuscript of a *roman* he had bought from an unknown writer and would read a passage here and there with the air of a man who had uncovered an important author.

It was while he was away on one of his trips to New York that Mr. Gluskin of Porcupine came into the office. There was something urgent about the way he asked for Mr. Simon. And besides it was a Monday evening and not a Wednesday afternoon.

"Mr. Simon is in New York. He'll be back in a few days," I informed him.

"In a few days it will be Rosh Hashanah," Mr. Gluskin said impatiently. Then he snorted, "How do you like that—in New York!" as if it were damn frivolous of Mr. Simon to be out of the city at a time like this.

"Is there anything I can do?" I ventured tepidly, not at all anxious to get mixed up in what was plainly, from Mr. Gluskin's behavior, a raging emergency up in Porcupine.

"Can you get us a cantor five days before Rosh Hashanah?" he challenged in that same snort. Then realizing that, after all, I had nothing to do with the fix his community was in, he softened up. "We got a telegram yesterday from Cantor Shimmele Goldfarb, the man Mr. Simon recommended to us for the High Holy Days. Goldfarb was in an accident and has to stay in bed for at least two weeks. So now you know the whole story. We have no cantor five days before Rosh Hashanah."

IN THE strict sense of the word, Porcupine I didn't even have a *chazan* in Shimmele Goldfarb. He was, and still is to this day, the proprietor of a little hand laundry and is known the year 'round as plain Sam Goldfarb. He is one of a handful of men in Toronto who are part-time *chazonim*. Alas for their dreams of becoming world-famous

cantors—as the years wore on they found themselves trapped behind sewing machines, in laundries, in bakery shops, and in grocery stores. Now and then some of them can be seen in Hyman's Bookshop or in Ladowsky's Restaurant on Spadina Avenue, exchanging bitter talk about the talent that's been stifled in each of them or arguing over the merits of the world-renowned cantors in New York and of the less renowned ones holding positions in the large synagogues of Toronto. Every year about two months before the High Holy Days they start bringing their worn-out cuts to the *Voice*. The Sams, the Daves, and the Morrisises become *Shimmelach*, *Dovidlach*, and *Moishelach*. Invariably they are photographed wearing great, puffed-up skullcaps and sprawling, black cravats pinned up against their prayer shawls. Under the pictures are florid descriptions of bygone greatness said to have been achieved in such cities as Warsaw, London, New York, etc. Then a final paragraph announcing that they are available for the High Holy Days either in Toronto or in the province. Naturally the ads diminish in number as the holidays draw near, since most of the men are hired either by congregations in Toronto or by the different communities throughout the province. And those who have not secured positions remove their cuts well in advance of the holidays as a matter of pride. So that Mr. Gluskin's anxiety about Porcupine's being caught without a cantor was warranted.

TOGETHER we quickly scanned the advertisements in the *Voice* and the only one still available as late as five days before Rosh Hashanah was a Feivele Gelfand, who, according to the blurb under the cut, had been at the age of eleven a wonder-child cantor in Lodz and whose great talent had persisted into adult life to make him the darling of Lemberg, Warsaw, and Philadelphia before he got to Toronto. When I told Cantor Gelfand over the telephone that a representative from Porcupine was waiting to speak to him about a position for the High Holy Days, he replied with an elaborate indifference that he was sorry he'd forgotten to remove the ad, and that he was at the moment considering offers from Winnipeg and Edmonton, although he would see the man from Porcupine if for no other reason than out of courtesy.

A half hour later he arrived at the office. Pompous and haughty, he towered fully two feet above my desk. He was plainly annoyed at the world that he was still available as late as five days before Rosh Hashanah and there was no doubt that he meant to take his anger out on Porcupine. Cantor Gelfand repeated his story about offers from Winnipeg and Edmonton for the benefit of Mr. Gluskin, but he added that he wasn't sure whether to accept since his wife wouldn't hear of his traveling two days and a night to conduct services in those far-off communities. Mr. Gluskin hurried to laud Mrs. Gelfand's good sense, pointing out temptingly that Porcupine was a mere thirteen hours away from Toronto. At this Gelfand began to hum in a barely audible falsetto. He stared intently at the ceiling as if lost in private thoughts. Then he shook his head from side to side for a long, long time and finally announced that he'd be too expensive for a place as small as Porcupine. There followed a brisk half hour of bargaining after which the cantor succumbed to one hundred dollars and traveling expenses, fully fifteen dollars more than the indisposed Cantor Goldfarb was to have received. But Porcupine was stuck and Gelfand knew it, even though exquisite care had been taken by Mr. Gluskin and myself to avoid the slightest hint about his being a last-minute replacement.

In the usual circumstances, a try-out would have been in order, and it wouldn't have been out of place for Cantor Gelfand to give a sample rendition on the premises of the *Voice*. As a matter of fact, it was quite common in those days for communities too small to stand the expenses of a try-out on a Sabbath before Rosh Hashanah to send representatives for the purpose of auditioning candidates in Mr. Simon's office, and every year around the time of the High Holy Days nasal lamentations of every description would issue forth from behind the editor's door. But in this delicate instance Mr. Gluskin didn't think it wise to press for an audition. Relieved that his community was spared the mess that had threatened, he quickly sealed the agreement with these few words:

"I want you should know, Cantor, I made a special trip from Porcupine. I have full power to hire and Porcupine will be satisfied as long as I'm satisfied. I always say, 'The way a man acts is his best credential.' Some-

thing tells me you're all right. I have full confidence even if you are coming to Porcupine sight unheard."

This neat figure of speech was followed by a bout of handshaking and the cantor left as pompously as he had come. My hand, too, was enthusiastically pumped by Mr. Gluskin, who promised to let Mr. Simon know how very helpful I had been. It was no small satisfaction to know that I had filled the breach so well in Mr. Simon's absence. With a feeling of some triumph, I went back to the business of composing New Year's greetings.

THE New Year's edition of the *Voice* was always fat with learned articles and an array of good-will messages ranging from that of the Prime Minister of Canada to that of the aldermen of Ward 4, which was the main locus of the Jewish community in Toronto during the 30's. A perennial challenge of tremendous proportions, by the time it was on the newsstands the New Year's issue had the members of the small staff looking as if they themselves had been run through the presses. In addition to sharing the tribulations of producing the New Year's issue with the rest of the workers, I was confronted with a special problem which the others were spared. In Toronto there are more than one hundred *landsmanshaften* and congregations that perpetuate the memories of towns and villages in Eastern Europe bearing some of the most fantastic names imaginable. Since many of these organizations take space to publish greetings, I had the ticklish assignment of transposing into phonetic English such names as Wierzbniak, Chenchine, Tzozmer, Plotszk, Husiatine, Driltz, Beizetchine, Chmielnik, Slipyeh, Narayew, and Ostrovztzeh—just to give a few random examples. After a few days of the kind of intense proofreading I had to do on the New Year's issue, these names would suddenly take on the appearance of typographical errors no matter what spelling I'd give them. I'd plead with Mr. Rifkind the linotypist to repeat the names for me slowly so that I might capture their true sound on paper. Mr. Rifkind was an irascible Litvak who wrote delightful Yiddish poetry for children and regarded my difficulties with gentle sadism. Whenever he'd see me coming he'd exclaim, "Aha, here comes the English editor

that can't spell English." All that was needed in our depleted condition late at night around Rosh Hashanah time was this little joke, and ugly quarrels would blow up between us over the respective peculiarities of the English and Slavic languages. Naturally, the other workers would line up solidly with Mr. Rifkind. Hadn't they been forced to labor tediously with store clerks, gas-meter inspectors, delivery men, and public officials of every kind over the spelling of their various names since they had come to Canada?

A noisy dispute on this very subject was proceeding merrily one night when I was interrupted by a telephone call. It was Cantor Gelfand's voice.

"You're the one who arranged I should go to Porcupine for the High Holidays, aren't you?"

"Yes," I answered. It was one-thirty in the morning and I wondered what had driven him to call at this ungodly hour.

"I won't be there. Send a telegram and tell them," he ordered.

Rosh Hashanah was two days away.

"But Cantor Gelfand, you're due in Porcupine tomorrow afternoon," I protested.

"I told you I can't go."

"But why?"

"Because I'm in prison."

There was the composure of the hopeless in his voice.

I must have asked several questions before I realized that Gelfand was no longer on the phone. Then a calm heavy voice announced that it was Desk Sergeant Bradeen, that there was no use discussing this matter over the telephone, and that I had better hurry on over to the Chestnut Street Police Station. Then he hung up. Without wasting a moment I went to Mr. Simon, who happily had come back to town that very evening. Starting with Mr. Gluskin's visit, I told him the entire story, ending up with the telephone call that had just come through from the police station. Mr. Simon listened impassively. When I had finished he put on his jacket and his topcoat with deliberate, ceremonious movements. Then he reached for his hat, blew a few abrupt little jets of breath at some dust specks on the hatband, and finally turned toward the door motioning for me to follow him.

Sergeant Bradeen was immensely relieved to see Mr. Simon, or "The Editor," as he was

generally called by the police and other officials. Cantor Gelfand remained aloof, looking wounded in the manner made famous by Paul Muni as Emile Zola. Three large policemen stood off at a distance casting troubled glances at their captive.

"Now we'll get somewhere," the desk sergeant said, as a kind of salute to Mr. Simon. And there was good reason for the tribute, too. Wasn't Mr. Simon known in the remotest precincts of the Toronto police force for his ability to explain the most esoteric of Jewish values? It was through his inimitable way of interpreting things that policemen pounding various beats in Ward 4 gained a keen insight into such institutions as the *mikveh*, ritual slaughter, chicken plucking, and sundry other practices that baffled the constabulary mind.

Electing a ponderously formal manner to hide his amusement at the sight of the three puzzled policemen towering over the little cantor, Mr. Simon said: "I would like please to know what the trouble is, Sergeant?"

"Is this man supposed to be an outstanding cantor?" asked Sergeant Bradeen.

"And suppose he isn't? Does that mean he should be arrested in the middle of the night like a criminal?"

"Answer my question, please!" the Sergeant insisted.

"I don't know if he is outstanding, but he is recognized as a cantor," replied Mr. Simon with neat diplomacy.

"So what's he doing driving a milk wagon and disturbing the peace in the deep of night?" Sergeant Bradeen asked. "He was bellowing from his wagon at the top of his voice when Constable Sloan picked him up." He nodded at one of the police officers to identify Sloan, who explained that complaints about the shouting had been coming in for three nights and that when finally apprehended Gelfand would give no reason whatsoever for the ungodly noise.

At this point Cantor Gelfand turned to Mr. Simon and spoke up for the first time in a broken sort of way.

"Maybe you can explain to a policeman," he said in Yiddish, "that I wasn't making a disturbance but singing a sweet *nigun* I learned as a child from the Gerer Rabbi himself. I can't." The rest of his story came in one tortured sentence. He had been rehearsing the High Holy Day liturgy while out on

his milk route in order to whip his *nusach* into perfect shape so that the Porcupine community would hear him at his best. "But it doesn't matter any more," he assured Mr. Simon in that hopeless voice he used over the telephone. "I started out two hours earlier just to be in time for the train to Porcupine that passes Toronto in forty-five minutes around. It's too late to finish my milk route and catch the train." Then he turned to me and asked in English: "You sent the telegram?"

Mr. Simon answered for me that it was never too late to send a telegram. Realizing that there wasn't enough time for extensive forays into the sociology of part-time *chazonus*, he turned to Sergeant Bradeen and spoke in a voice that bristled with urgency: "I must see you alone for five minutes, Sergeant. It is very important." The request was promptly granted and Bradeen ushered Mr. Simon into a private office. Even before the five minutes were up they were back. Sergeant Bradeen proceeded slowly to his desk and from there faced his duty like the man of probity and courage he was.

"THERE'S been a misunderstanding," and nodding at Gelfand he continued gravely, "this man's a cantor all right. That was no shouting you heard, Sloan, it was a holy chant. At least that's what the Editor here says," Bradeen added quickly. This piece of intelligence was received with restrained consternation by the police. Avoiding Gelfand's hot glances of indictment, the three constables made strenuous efforts to maintain face in a most difficult situation as the desk sergeant pursued his course unflinchingly.

"It seems that the cantor is under contract to conduct prayers starting at sundown for a congregation up in Porcupine. As God-fearing men, none of us would want to see his flock up north go without services on what I have been told is their most important holiday of the year. The Editor has given me a very helpful suggestion and if all of us cooperate we should get the cantor over to the station in time for his train."

Sergeant Bradeen paused a moment to permit the minions of the law to prepare to redeem themselves in the eyes of Cantor Gelfand and of his God who was waiting to

be served in Porcupine. Realizing that further talk was unnecessary, the sergeant began to issue orders to implement Mr. Simon's battle plan. I was drafted to take down the names of the unserved customers on Gelfand's route. Constable Sloan took on the job of finishing the milk deliveries and taking the horse and wagon back to the stable. A second police officer was detailed to relieve Sloan on the beat and the third man was assigned to drive the cantor home for his satchel which had been packed earlier that evening and then over to the station within the forty minutes that were left. Mr. Simon interrupted to advise that I ought to accompany the cantor so that I might take over such time-consuming chores as explanations and/or first aid in case Mrs. Gelfand

should become hysterical if she chanced to see her husband coming home in a police cruiser. This thoughtful suggestion was quickly incorporated into the scheme of things and Mr. Simon settled back to watch closely every word and every move of the police officials. For here was a drama to be remembered and recounted, how as the city lay wrapped in a deep sleep, unconscious of the emergency, there set out from the Chestnut Street Station in the dawn. . . .

Some weeks after, Porcupine had seen the High Holy Days come and go, and Mr. Gluskin happened into the office. I asked him how his community had enjoyed Cantor Gelfand. He gave a noncommittal shrug of the shoulders and said, "Not bad, but a Yosele Rosenblatt he wasn't."

THE SABBATH BRIDE

SAUL TOUSTER

THE world comes and goes with the Sabbath Bride
And hid in the folds of her pure white cloak
We are quiet children at her side.

O who has not risen at her stroke
To greet her with neither wonder nor despair
But with a pure domestic calm?
Open the book of brightness and prepare
For her coming, attend her with a psalm.

There comes a lull in striving and in the house,
Full with the joy of what we put aside,
She moves, familiarly, a gentle spouse.

The world comes and goes with the Sabbath Bride.

The world comes and goes with the Sabbath Bride,
Celebrant in the train of her fullness,
As we, enhanced by her bright tide,
Ascend to the last day we bless.

Declining, in veiled night, she holds until
She implicates the world we know.

We reach, she is disengaged, the stars are still—
First the long slow climb, then the letting go.

O dream, dream the six eternities and tend
To the empty house, tend to those who have died.
This, now, is the incommensurable end.

The world comes and goes with the Sabbath Bride.

SAUL TOUSTER's poems have appeared previously in the pages of COMMENTARY. Mr. Touster was born in New York City in 1925.

CEDARS OF LEBANON

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Selections from a Jewish Existentialist Thinker

LEV SHESTOV

THE name of Shestov is almost completely unknown in America. Three of his books, it is true, have been translated into English: *Penultimate Words and Other Essays* (1916); *All Things Are Possible* (with a foreword by D. H. Lawrence, 1920); and *In Job's Balances* (1932). But they are long since out of print, and never seem to have made any impression at all. Nor has he experienced a much happier fate in Europe. Though he is still read there by more serious philosophers and theologians, the modish waves of Existentialism have washed the memory of this great existentialist thinker onto shores of comparative obscurity.

Shestov, were he alive, might not be displeased; he had always insisted that any existentialist philosophy that regarded itself as something to be taught, or any existentialist philosopher who sought disciples, was a contradiction in terms. (He did, nevertheless, have one disciple: the brilliant poet and essayist Benjamin Fondane, who died in Auschwitz.) Still, if Shestov had nothing to teach us, it may be we have something to learn from him.

ON Shestov's life and thought, the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* gives us the following information:

"Shestov, Lev (originally Lev Isaakovich Schwarzmann), philosopher, b. Kiev, Russia, 1866; d. Paris, 1938. In 1922 he became professor of Russian philosophy on the Russian faculty of the University of Paris. His suprarationalistic philosophy was based on the Bible and in opposition to every merely and exclusively scientific philosophy. Thus, independently of Kierkegaard, he often reached the same conclusions as the Danish philosopher."

The summary is essentially correct. Yet how little justice it does to Shestov! How unprepared it leaves one for the audacity of his thought, the polemical bite of his style, the

range of his erudition, the quickness of his sensibility! It gives no hint that here was a philosopher who spent his life butting his head against a stone wall, and who proudly claimed this to be the authentic task of philosophy.

The stone wall was the natural universe as science, common sense, and traditional philosophy conceive it; that is, a universe inexorably governed by general and necessary laws that are open to discovery by reason. For Shestov, such a universe cannot be lived in, and with the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* he shouts: "But what do I care for the laws of nature and arithmetic . . .? As though a stone wall really were a consolation . . . simply because it is as true as twice two makes four. Oh, absurdity of absurdities! How much better it is to understand it all, to recognize it all, all the impossibilities and stone walls; not to be reconciled to one of those impossibilities and stone walls if it disgusts you to be reconciled."

Shestov could not be reconciled. He demanded a miracle. He insisted, shrilly and stubbornly, that the real was something more than the rational, indeed that the rational explanation itself was the Original Lie resulting from man's having eaten, in defiance of the divine prohibition, of the tree of knowledge. If God exists, he said, basing himself on the Old and New Testament alike, it means that all things are possible—that what has been shall not have been, that what must be shall not be.

Obscurantism? No doubt. But it was a particularly lucid obscurantism. For Shestov offered no formulas by which one could pierce the stone wall of natural necessity. He advised only that the consolations of traditional philosophy be scorned, that all which made men resigned before the vicissitudes of mortal existence be flatly rejected. The stone wall he knew to be—a stone wall, hard and impenetrable. Yet

he believed that a man, banging his head against this wall, might in the depths of his helplessness and hopelessness let escape a cry that would bodily transport him over to the other side, where all things are possible, where God is.

Shestov was a Biblical thinker for whom Job, inconsolable on his dung heap, was the archetype of the religious man, and Job's friends, the archetype of the anti-religious. That he was a specifically "Jewish thinker" is as arguable as the term is vague; he had no use for rabbinic Judaism, though he did contribute to Zionist periodicals, and it is hard to see what use rabbinic Judaism could have of him. In fact, it is hard to see what use any organized religion could have of him, so the neglect into which he has fallen need occasion no surprise. Through him there lies no salvation; he said so himself, repeatedly; salvation lies only through oneself—God willing. He was an ut-

terly useless thinker of utterly useless truths, which is exactly what he wanted to be.

THE following excerpts are from a number of Shestov's books, including some not available in English. The form of the *pensée* which I have chosen to give these excerpts is not entirely strange to Shestov, who used it for his major work, *Athens and Jerusalem*. It seems especially suitable for the present purpose of introducing him to a reader who might find any single lengthy selection from his writings rather baffling. In a few cases the excerpt is not as it appears integrally in the text, but is a mosaic of different statements on the same theme. The headings are likewise my own. I have made all translations from the French edition of his works; Shestov wrote in Russian but supervised the French translations, which may thus be taken as accurately conveying his ideas.

—IRVING KRISTOL

The partition: A naturalist once arranged the following experiment: a glass receptacle was filled with water and divided into two compartments by a glass partition. In one compartment there was placed a pike, and in the other, an assortment of small fish which serve ordinarily as food for the pike. The pike did not observe the glass partition, and threw himself toward his prey; naturally, he collided sharply with the barrier. He repeated his efforts many times and always with the same disillusioning result. Finally, seeing that all his exertions were in vain, the pike gave up—so completely, that when the glass barrier was removed, a few days later, he began to swim peacefully among the fish and no longer thought to attack them. Does not the same thing happen with men? It might be that the ideas they hold on the boundaries between "this world" and "the other world" are merely habitual and not at all, as they were thought to be before Kant, dependent on the nature of things; nor need these ideas be dependent on the nature of the human mind, as has been affirmed since Kant. The partition doubtless exists, and renders vain all our attempts to escape beyond the limits of knowledge. But it may also be the case that, in the course of our existence, a moment comes when the partition is suddenly removed.

True philosophy: True philosophy should have nothing in common with logic. True

philosophy is an art that aims to open a way through the chain of logical reasoning and push man into the boundless ocean of the fantastic, where everything is at once possible and impossible.

The blindness of objectivity: If all men were blind and if only one had his eyes opened for an instant, permitting him to contemplate the splendor of this divine work that is the universe, science would pay no heed to his discovery. Nevertheless, the testimony of one clear-sighted being is worth more than that of millions of blind men. Man can sometimes experience a genuine inner illumination; even though it last only a few seconds, need it be passed over in silence merely because this particular phenomenon did not take place under normal conditions, and could not be repeated at will?

Original sin: Original sin—that is to say, the knowledge that what is, is necessarily.

Kinds of knowing: Scripture does not reject cognition in the proper sense of the term, and does not forbid it. On the contrary, it is written that man was called to give a name to all things. But man was not satisfied, he did not wish merely to name things created by God. This was given perfect expression by Kant in the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Experience shows

us what exists, but it does not show us that what exists therefore exists necessarily."

The misery of philosophy: The philosophers hope to "explain" the world in such a way that everything becomes clear and transparent, and life no longer exhibits anything problematic or mysterious. Would it not be better, on the contrary, to apply oneself to showing that what seems clear and comprehensible is strangely enigmatic? Would it not be better to try to deliver oneself and others from the power of concepts whose distinctness kills mystery? The sources, the roots of being are actually in that which is hidden, not in that which is discovered. *Deus est Deus absconditus.*

Creative doubt: In the domain of ultimate questions, one must doubt everything—but not in order to arrive at solid convictions. Doubt must become a constant and creative force, impregnating all of one's being to the very essence. For a stable and solidly established knowledge of ultimate answers has as its consequence an imperfect perception of the universe.

Thinking: Artists and philosophers portray a man who thinks as being of solemn aspect, imposing, with a severe expression, a profound look, a proud mien—a true eagle ready to soar into the skies. But nothing of the sort! A man who really thinks is above all a being who has lost his equilibrium: his arms wildly clutching, his feet jerking in mid-air, his face terrified and almost stupid—a pitiful caricature of impotence and confusion.

Out of the depths: The Psalmist says: "Out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord." What relation is there between "the depths" and "Lord"? When there is neither depths, nor horror, nor despair, man does not see God and does not call to him.

Orpheus and Eurydice: In antiquity, it was thought that entry into the realm of shadows is forbidden to mortals. But the infinite sorrow of Orpheus and his wonderful song vanquished the invincible Hades and brought him close to Eurydice. When Orpheus began to sing, says the poet who reports the ancient myth, everything came

to a halt in hell. Tantalus ceased to pursue the water that escaped him, the wheel of Ixion stopped, the Danaides forgot their bottomless casks, and Sisyphus himself sat on his stone. Thanks to his great love, Orpheus succeeded in defeating the laws of hell. He succeeded because he believed that, bereft of Eurydice, he was the most unhappy of men, that he alone was unhappy, and that nothing else existed in the world except Eurydice and his love for her. He was deceived, obviously: Anaximander would have seen it clearly, and Aristotle would have been able to prove it beyond a doubt. But the gods decided otherwise.

Faith: Faith is not reliance on what has been told us, on what has been taught us, on what we have heard. Faith is a new dimension of thought, unknown, strange to speculative philosophy, and which opens the way leading to the Creator of all things, to the source of all possibilities.

Unde malum? Whence evil? It is only when philosophers understand that one cannot answer this question, and many other questions as well, it is only then they will know that one does not always ask a question to get an answer, that there are questions whose significance is precisely that they do not admit of answers.

Solitude: It is shameful to be irremediably unhappy. The unhappy man whom nothing can console is deprived of the protection of earthly laws. The ties that bind him to society are broken forever. And since every man is sooner or later condemned to be irremediably unhappy, the last word in earthly wisdom is solitude.

Literary tragedy and personal tragedy: When the "experience" took place, when the unknown revealed itself to him in his madness, Nietzsche, like all those in his situation, did not suppose that this was exactly what one talked about in literature. He felt simply that something atrocious and monstrous was being born in his soul. He did not recognize in his torment and despair the glorious "suffering" which, following Schopenhauer, he had invoked and blessed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He could see in himself no resemblance to those heroes, those

interesting sinners, on the type of Tannhäuser, who postured so gracefully in the operas of Wagner. There was not the slightest trace of tragic beauty in his situation—this tragic beauty that he was accustomed to admire in the works of the ancients.

The four walls: The scholar enclosed within the four walls of his room sees nothing except these walls; but it is precisely of these walls that he refuses to speak; they don't interest him, he doesn't feel them. Now, if by chance he became conscious of their presence and began to speak about them, his discourse would be of immense importance. This is what happens sometimes when the study is transformed into a prison.

Gogol's manuscript: When Gogol threw the second part of his *Dead Souls* into the fire, he was said to be mad—this verdict was the only way to preserve civilized ideals. But in burning his precious manuscript, which might have immortalized more than a dozen healthy-minded critics, Gogol did something that was more important than writing it. That, the idealists will never admit. They need the "works" of Gogol, but Gogol himself, his great wretchedness, his great ugliness, matters little to them.

Spinoza: Spinoza says: The struggle against truths established by reason must be sterile. And since this struggle is impossible, one must submit. One must understand that every individual being, whether it be Job or the Logos-Messiah, is condemned in advance, by virtue of an eternal and ineluctable law, to suffer and disappear. Consequently, man must renounce whatever has a concrete and particular existence, and himself above all, in order to orient his thought toward that which has neither beginning nor end, which neither is born nor dies; that is precisely what it means to contemplate life *sub specie aeternitatis vel necessitatis*.

The death of Socrates: How painful it is to read Plato's account of the last conver-

sations of Socrates. His days, his hours are numbered, and he—he talks, he talks, he talks. . . . Socrates passed the month following his condemnation in incessant conversation with his friends and students. That's what it means to be loved and to have disciples! You cannot even die in peace! The best death is that which is generally considered the worst: when one is alone, far from one's own country, dying like a dog in an alley. At least it is impossible any longer to dissemble during those last minutes, to talk or to teach, and one is allowed to keep quiet and prepare oneself for the terrible, and perhaps especially important, event.

Kierkegaard's failure: When Kierkegaard felt that it was not given to him, as he expressed it, "to accomplish the last movement of faith," he turned toward the ethical. And then his existential philosophy acquired a new meaning: it was no longer a mad struggle for the impossible, but a more or less well-calculated struggle for a possible victory over those who thought differently from what his philosophy prescribed.

What is metaphysics? Metaphysics permits those who have never smelled the odor of burnt powder to acquire the renown of a hero.

Either/or: Either the thinking of Socrates or the thinking of Abraham, of Job, of the Prophets and the Apostles. Either speculative philosophy, having its beginning in wonder and seeking to "understand," or truly existential philosophy, issuing from despair ("out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord") and leading to the revelation of Scripture.

Darwin and the Jews: Darwin and the Jews are both right. One part of the human race descends from Adam, feels in its blood the burning of the ancestral sin, suffers from it and longs for paradise lost. The other part issues from the ape, free of all sin—its conscience is tranquil, nothing torments it, and it does not dream of the impossible.

ON THE HORIZON

EXODUS: ADAPTATION BY SHOLEM ASCH

Even in Technicolor, the Legend Works Its Magic

LESLIE A. FIEDLER

ON THE face of it, the *Moses* of Sholem Asch seems to fit easily into the category of that hybrid which is the current historical-religious novel. The traditional features of the historical novel (loose linear form, sentimentality toward the past, exotic sexiness, broad comic relief) are offered us in a style supposed to be suitable for the popular rendering of Holy Scripture (faintly archaic, stuffily reverential, devoid of irony). In short, we seem to be in the presence of the transposition of a great religious legend, still regarded by a large group in our society as literally true, into the favorite sub-literary form of that group. Yet in this case first appearances are a bit deceptive.

As the historical novel has grown more popular, it has grown more frankly meretricious. The days when *Quo Vadis* could win for its author a Nobel Prize are remembered with embarrassment; and to write in the style of *Quo Vadis* now, with any ambition beyond the modest one of making a living, seems unforgivable. But this is precisely the attempt of Sholem Asch in *Moses* and the whole series of which it is a climax; and it may be taken as tribute to the power of the Biblical story over a writer who has some

THE modern popularizer of religious legend, however religious himself, often succeeds in his task only by filtering out of the legend all that gives it religious significance. How much this is true of Sholem Asch's latest novel, *Moses*, is the subject of this commentary by LESLIE A. FIEDLER. Mr. Fiedler, associate professor of humanities at the University of Montana, is on leave to the University of Rome, where he is teaching under a Fulbright fellowship.

real relation to it that Asch manages to survive purely literary objections.

The worth of a whole genre is at stake in an examination of *Moses*, whose strengths must therefore be pinned down carefully (the weaknesses are easier to expose). It is tempting to call its virtues cinematic, since they are most triumphantly exploited in the movies of D. W. Griffith and Cecil B. De Mille: a vivid, unabashed vulgarity in projecting moral conflicts as melodrama; a vision of history in terms of pageantry and mob scenes; and a naive post-Puritan piety at home in an ambience of sexuality. Everything is there: the extras, the make-up a shade realer than reality, the colossal sets, the sheen of splendid flesh (villainous, of course, and doomed), the sound, the technicolor.

As the master of such a form, Asch is undoubtedly the most popular Jewish writer in America; and who can doubt that among the hundreds of thousands who have read *The Nazarene*, *The Apostle*, and *Mary* there have been some who have responded with a shudder of real reverence, a genuine illumination, as the ancient stories assert their ineradicable appeal. Through a haze of bogus solemnity, via a trivial and hence acceptable form, some archetypal resonance has been bootlegged into the unconscious. The Torah must speak in the language of men, the rabbis asserted, and—though we are tempted to cry out in protest—even in the fallen language of our mass culture.

ASCH has turned to a central legend of Jewishness (perhaps as a peace offering to his own community which has grown in-

creasingly hostile over his "Christianizing"), to the account of the Exodus—the passage from slavery to freedom. That he has, following the pattern of his Christian books, chosen to do so in terms of a hero-story, an account of an individual forging the conscience of his race, is, I think, doubly unfortunate.

First, Moses is a singularly intractable figure for a popular storyteller pledged to "humanize" his protagonist. The glimmerings of individual personality that persist in the bare and stylized Biblical account of Moses are bafflingly contradictory: the gentle, inexplicably guilt-ridden stutterer and the Michel-angelesque titan at home with God and the lightnings. In Asch's book, there is a constant danger of the protagonist splitting in two, leaving finally a modern Israeli major-general and a liberal-minded member of a modern congregation regarding each other in confusion over the fragments of the archetype.

And second, Moses as a "character" should not be permitted to blur the story of the timeless encounter between God and all of Israel which is called "coming up out of Egypt." Moses is no irreplaceable redeemer in the Christian sense. There is a traditional Jewish saying that if Moses had not brought us forth another would have done quite as well; and in the Haggadah, a communally composed ritualized retelling of the tale for Passover, Moses has quite disappeared. There is something more than a little upsetting, falsely modern, in Mr. Asch's "advanced" Moses, a kind of progressive rabbi wheedling and whipping a barbaric horde into liberty.

But more significant than the particular weaknesses of the individual story are certain indications in *Moses* of difficulties raised by the whole popular tradition of handling religious legend or "myth." The most important writers of our time, authors generally regarded with some suspicion by the average reader of Asch, are also often concerned with mythic material; but their strategies of approach are quite different. The serious writer, using what I will call the "poetic" approach, examines the great treasures of legend upon which religions—ancient and modern—have depended, with certain new techniques of interpretation provided by recent anthropology and psychology (Thomas Mann's Joseph stories are good examples). Such writers read a myth as a communal imagining, through whose symbolic half-

disclosures can be discovered a dateless history of man, a record of events not given once and for all, but eternally repeated in the inner life of every individual. The serious writer searches for abiding significances behind parochial images; and he uses contemporary techniques not to "modernize" the myths of mankind, but to redeem their timelessness and their universality.

An essential aspect of the poetic approach is irony, and it is this even more than its anti-historicity that distinguishes it from the popular approach. The double attitude which at once believes and doubts, accepts and protests, deprecates and glorifies, is at the root of all truly modern styles. The simple poetry of a primitive folk to whom the marvelous is a matter of fact is lost to us forever; and the popular attempt to simulate it leads to a kind of fake-simple glum solemnity typified by run-of-the-mill church organ music and the prose styles of such writers as Lloyd Douglas and—Sholem Asch. The kind of believer to whom the popular styles pander thinks he can believe only what is made rational, but the serious writer knows that the very essence of genuine myth is madness, high humor, absurdity. The going down into Egypt and the coming up, the splitting of the waters and the promise on the mountain are important precisely because they are of a different order from the Battle of Gettysburg, and because they can only be accepted by transcending the realities which determine that two and two make four.

IN ITS taste for absurdity and its quest for timelessness, the contemporary poetic approach is closer to the older naive folk treatment than is the popular, historical, quasi-rationalist approach. It is when Mr. Asch borrows from *midrash* and *haggadah* that he most nearly becomes a serious modern writer. The traditional Jewish sources have ceaselessly reworked the Moses story (it was, after all, never for the folk a story canonically established at a certain point, but one dreamed forever—its eternal truth inhering not in some specific moment in the past but in an endlessly receding future) and they supply to Asch the concept of Amalek as an enemy born and reborn to the end of time, as well as the notion of all souls, past and present, having stood (and still standing!) at the foot of Sinai to cry out their acceptance of the Law.

This is indeed living water from dry rock, a revelation of what is most difficult for us to know; that which is all the time happening. That this is no secret from Mr. Asch is revealed in his epigraph: "The event is the seed sown in the fields of time. The seed decays and is lost. That which blossoms forth is truth; for, as it is written: Truth shall spring out of the earth." Which quotation is in itself, by the way, an example of how to interpret a text.

But Mr. Asch does not remain true to the insight of these words, submitting instead to the "popular" demand that would make parochial history out of timeless legend. The popular mind does not know any longer what the folk mind knew instinctively and the sophisticated poetic mind has rediscovered; that it needs the resistance of the marvelous. It insists, in its folly, on a clear distinction between "legend" and "history," "apocrypha" and "Scripture," "mythology" and "the Bible," condescending to the former as child's play and gulping down the latter as fact. Mr. Asch yields to this distinction, labeling certain parts of his account "later legend has added. . . ." or "the love of Israel has persuaded itself that. . . ." It is interesting that he does not so scrupulously tag his own emendations and inserted entertainments: the slapstick comedy of the Balaam episodes or the spicy-stories byplay under "the honey-smeared navel of Ashtoreth."

The main body of the myth is turned into "history," carefully dated and localized, and buttressed with patiently worked up documentation: the Scripture's shadowy "the Pharaoh" is given a dynastic name; the obviously mistaken reference to crossing the "Red Sea" is quietly but firmly emended to crossing the "Sea of Reeds," etc. The map on the flyleaf gives away the whole game; here is no ancient chart with fabled monsters in the shadows of the hills and lusty winds with swollen cheeks in the corners, but a product of up-to-date science with the topography accurately indicated and a scale of miles. Who can doubt that the march traced on such a map "really" took place!

But Mr. Asch, since he has chosen to play the game of history, must take the consequences. He is aware, for instance, of the disconcerting fact that contemporary Egyptian records make no mention of the enslavement of the Jews, much less of their escape; and he

returns to the problem compulsively again and again, interrupting his story to assure us that the number of Jews involved was so small the Egyptians didn't even trouble to write them down on the slave lists, etc., etc. But who asked him? Similarly, he feels driven to refer to the astonishing resemblance between the story of Moses in the bulrushes and certain myths of the infancy of the god Horus, as if by assuring us that he is aware of these matters he thereby assures us that they are of no importance. And finally, having placed his Moses in time, Mr. Asch is plagued with the prime problem of "influence." Did not Moses borrow his concept of God from the Aton-religion of the monotheistic Amen-Hotep? And once more the pageant halts and the action is suspended, while Aton is rather unconvincingly slandered.

It is not only the historicity of his tale that Mr. Asch feels obliged to defend, but also its rationality. He is forever cleaning up, toning down, and explaining away for the benefit of a postulated ideal reader who distrusts the marvelous: a liberal, genteel, rationalistic, anti-clerical Jew, especially tender over certain Christian objections to the Mosaic concept of Justice as superior to Love (though presumably less sensitive to vulgarity in prose style and treatment). There are four main stumbling blocks for such a reader: the miracles; the brutality and general ungentlemanliness of the Jews; their respect for certain obviously irrational taboos; their excessive concern with ritual and sacrifice.

Toward the miracles, Mr. Asch has several attitudes: some he swallows quickly and passes on (the burning bush); some he explains away totally in naturalistic terms (the pillar of flame and the cloud of smoke); but chiefly he leans on what might be called The Theory of the Modified Order of Nature. Manna and the plagues are merely special extensions of certain quite ordinary phenomena; they call for no suspension of the "laws of nature," merely a (forgivable under the circumstances) speeding up of events. The God of Asch, being as rational as any of us, would not absurdly disrupt his own commonsensical order; he simply works overtime on certain critical occasions.

That the ancient Hebrews really believed in "an eye for an eye" and vengeance "even unto the third and fourth generation" for

man and God alike, Asch is not prepared to admit. These principles, abhorrent to all men of good will, may be written down in the text, but they have only a limited and specific reference, Asch insists, and are canceled out by more congenial references to loving one's neighbor and individual responsibility. The cry of communal guilt and total vengeance is almost expurgated from Asch's revised version; and the irrational bloody horror of the Bible's deepest strata is rationalized away: the first archaic "ten commandments" is not even mentioned, and the terrifying cryptic fragment about the circumcision of the sons of Moses disappears. The actual deeds that remain imbedded in the story (the obliteration of cities, the looting of the Egyptians) are editorialized into reasonable facsimiles of the "decent thing" by talk of ultimatums and provocation and of retroactive agreements for the collection of back pay. In the atmosphere of the White Paper and the Labor Relations Board the sense of ancient terror is lost.

As for laws about not seething calves in their mothers' milk, or not eating the flesh of beasts that do not split the hoof and chew the cud, or of avoiding—as untouchably filthy—menstruating women, these are either rationalized or sentimentalized into safeguards against idolatry, wise hygienic regulations, and respect for the rights of women!

The elaborate rules concerning sacrifice, ritual duties, and the privileges of the priesthood especially irk Mr. Asch, who considers them the joint product of selfish scheming on the part of the priests and concessions wrung from an unwilling Moses by a superstitious semi-barbaric horde. Indeed, for the sake of the melodrama which his genre demands, Mr. Asch is willing to make of Aaron an arch-villain, the ideal opponent of his righteous Moses; he comes within a hairsbreadth of remaking the story in the image of the New Testament's black and white struggle between the High Priest and the Nazarene. Moses, conceived of by Mr. Asch as a blood-brother to the most emancipated Jews or Unitarians, thinks of religion as formless and individualistic, an act of unhoused and unritualized communion between the single man and Spirit.

The notion, so strong in the actual Torah, of the need for a communal form of worship, based on taboo, ritual, and myth, and guarded by a hierarchy armed with the power of

death against its disrupters; the concept of religion itself as having no existence outside its traditional symbolic forms, is uncongenial to Mr. Asch's protestant liberalism, and he generously acquits Moses of having subscribed to such beliefs. Even if one takes Moses and Aaron as symbolic representations of Priest and Prophet, their relationship in Israel has not been that of an irreconcilable clash between selfish superstition and disinterested truth as in Mr. Asch's post-enlightenment reading, but of a healthy dialectical interplay between conservatism and liberalism, tradition and insight. The incandescence of the priestly mind at its best, its balance and gentle piety, inform precisely the closing words of Deuteronomy which Mr. Asch is pleased to have a presumably anti-priestly Moses speak as the climax of his thought.

AND yet—despite the shortcomings of Mr. Asch's book as pseudo-history or apologetics, it has an impressive sweep when it is content to project the movement, the sound, the living feel of harried masses pressing on through the darkness, or stuttering to a halt in the desert blaze. The pulpit posturing of the prose no longer disturbs us; it is as if we were sitting once more in the familiar blackness of the movie house, watching on the screen the technicolored dreaming of all of us.

And there are achievements beyond these; for when Mr. Asch puts aside his concern with dates and documentation, when he turns to the traditional Jewish method of textual exegesis which it was once fashionable to call fantastic quibbling, he moves to a deeper level of symbol and significance. In his command to Moses at the edge of the "Sea of Reeds," God had said *first*, "Tell the Bnai Israel to go forward!" and only then, "Lift up thy staff. . . ." And from this order of words, Mr. Asch tells us, Moses was able to deduce that the descent into the watery depths must precede the miracle. First the people must enter the sea, *then* the waters would be parted. In this version, the Biblical account is restored to its true archetypal form; at the start of the night journey, a symbolic drowning, a real immersion and rebirth, rather than the dry-shod passage of the account unpoetically read. Perhaps, after all, there is more magic and truth in *pilpul* than in objective history; and this, at least, is worth remembering.

THE STUDY OF MAN

NEW LIGHT ON THE RACES OF MAN

The Genes Provide a Clue to Biological Kinship

DON J. HAGER

UNTIL a few years ago, a book on race was more likely to deal with politics than biology. Even those whose sole concern was the scientific study of the varieties of mankind were drawn into the battle against the political misuse, by chauvinist and fascist forces, of real or presumed racial differences. Today, the danger is far less serious than it has been for the last seventy-five years. Which leaves us, still, with the scientific problem itself: what does it mean to speak of the races of man?

Of late, substantial progress has been made toward answering the question. We now understand, in large measure, why previous approaches to the problem of race classification resulted in confusion; and we are coming to see the way to a comprehensive and consistent understanding of the physical variations in man. The "races of man" now takes on a new meaning. For it has been possible to establish that there are reliable differences among groups, differences in the degree to which they possess

certain genes, those basic hereditary constituents that biologically determine man's characteristics. These are not hard and fast or absolute differences; it is a matter, rather, of relative frequencies of a few genes. And fortunately for those of us who are understandably anxious about the possible political misuse of race, these differences, distinct as they are, and, as we shall see, useful as they are as clues to the unraveling of the history of man, have only the most infinitesimal bearing, if any, on human nature in society.

FOR over a century anthropologists sought to classify man by establishing a series of indices that in their totality would sharply distinguish one racial group from another. Armed with calipers, measuring boards, metric tapes, goniometers, and an abiding faith in quantitative coefficients, they reduced the form of the human body to a series of measurements: cephalic index, nasal index, bigonial diameter, bizygomatic diameter, sitting height, pelvic breadth, face height, scapular index, and so on—one anatomist, it is said, took ten thousand measurements of the human skull!

The man in the street was untroubled by the fact that, while eye form may be used to distinguish the Mongoloid group from the Negroid and Caucasoid, it does not distinguish between Negroid and Caucasoid; that dark- and light-skinned people are found in all the major racial groups; that the tallest and shortest people in the world both belong to the same major racial group—the Negroid. To the anthropologist, however, these were serious problems. And there was no way of dodging the simple mathematical fact that the more you multiplied criteria,

CAUGHT between nationalist and fascist affirmers of the significance of "race" on the one hand, and vocal liberal deniers of any meaningfulness to the concept on the other, the ordinary man scarcely knows what to believe. However, recent advances in the science of physical anthropology seem to offer a solution to his dilemma, and incidentally promise to light up the early history of man with a clarity unavailable to us up to now. DON J. HAGER, who here reports on these new developments, teaches social biology and human genetics at Princeton University and the New School for Social Research. He has published technical articles in leading scholarly periodicals.

the more types you had to define. Before long, texts on race were littered with "primary races," "primary sub-races," "secondary races" ("mixed"), "composite primary sub-races," and "residual mixed types" (an academic euphemism for the human types that defy classification).

The aim of all this was of course to arrive at a clear-cut classification of races. Such a classification might be the first step in tracing the paths of biological descent responsible for the present physical differences in mankind. But classification proved far more difficult in the case of man than in almost any other species.

At the root of the confusion lay the now outmoded and erroneous "blending theory" of biological inheritance. This "common sense" view of heredity, developed by the British biometrician, Francis Galton, was for long the dominant theory of human hereditary mechanisms. It still survives today, unfortunately, in many texts and treatises on the physical anthropology of man. His theory assumes that the two parents together contribute on the average one-half of each of the faculties inherited by their offspring—each parent contributes one-quarter, the four grandparents contribute among them one-quarter (or one-sixteenth each), and so on. The hypothetical sum of the infinite series $1/2, 1/4, 1/8, 1/16 \dots$ is equal to one human being.

This theory had good scientific warrant in statistical studies, which revealed that the correlation between parents and offspring for many traits was about one-half, and between offspring and grandparents about one-quarter. It was concluded, therefore, that genetic traits appeared to "blend" in much the same way that a mixture of black and white pigment produces gray. These assumptions and studies supported popular usage in identifying a person's racial membership as "pure-blooded," "full-blooded," "half-breed," "one-eighth Negro," "one-quarter Indian," etc. The blending theory implied the presence—today or at some time in the past—of pure races, like primary colors, that had blended.

SINCE Galton, we have made enormous progress in our understanding of the mechanism of heredity. Just as in physics the originally hypothetical atom has revolutionized our understanding of reality, and become for the physicist—and for the rest of us—the reality

underlying ordinary appearance, so too, in biology, an originally hypothetical particle, the gene, has become the key to unlock the reality behind biological appearance. We now know a great deal about genes, enough to be sure that the blending theory is only a very rough approximation of what actually occurs.

As every schoolboy knows, Gregor Mendel, an Austrian monk, discovered in the middle of the 19th century, by way of experiments on peas, the mechanism of heredity in sexual species, plant or animal. Apparently both the male and the female possess an agent for each physical characteristic, which agent was later called a gene. Thus, whether a pea is tall or short will be determined by two genes, one inherited from the female stamen and one from the male pistil. Genes may be either dominant or recessive; thus, in the case of peas, tallness is dominant, so that a cross between a tall and short plant will produce a tall one. Sometimes neither gene is dominant, and a cross produces an intermediate form, which is apparently a blend.

Mendel's work was forgotten for close to fifty years, and only rediscovered at the turn of the century. By now, while no one has yet seen a gene, we know they are arranged in linear fashion along objects in the nucleus of the cell; these objects are called chromosomes. Each species has a distinctive number of chromosomes—man has forty-eight. The chromosomes—and of course the genes within them—are arranged in pairs, as Mendel's work suggested, so that two genes, one inherited from the male and one from the female, determine each hereditary trait (it is believed that man possesses between 20,000 and 40,000 genes). Egg and sperm cells, in distinction to all other cells contain only half the chromosomes (selected at random) of the normal cell, and the full number is then restored in sexual union, giving a human being an assortment of twenty-four chromosomes from his mother and twenty-four from his father.

This bare recital conceals some remarkable possibilities. For example, since the twenty-four chromosomes that go into an egg or sperm cell are selected at random, each pair of parental chromosomes giving up one, it is possible for a single individual to produce no less than $16,777,216$ types of egg or sperm cells differing in their hereditary characteristics!

How does all this affect our understanding of human race? For one thing, we know that genes are *specific* in effect and do not blend or

mix; that is: interbreeding does not cause the genes to lose their relatively separate and distinct identities and properties. A single gene of the fruit fly has been traced through three hundred generations; at the end of these vicissitudes, its effect was the same as at the beginning. We also know that genes are not transmitted to biological descendants in set packages, but rather in the form of an enormous number of different possible "assortments." So that the statement that some individual is "one-quarter Indian" can only mean that one of his grandparents was socially defined as "Indian," but not that he has inherited exactly one-quarter of that grandparent's Indian genes. He may have inherited more or less of them: it would depend on what characteristics we consider to define a person as Indian. And sheer chance would have decided *which* of these genes the subject inherited; for it is statistically possible that not a single one of his chromosomes should have come from a particular grandparent! (The chance, admittedly small in the case of a 48-chromosome animal like man, is one in 16,777,216.)*

This problem of the "one-quarter Indian" warrants further examination. On the average, we could expect to have twelve chromosomes from each grandparent; but the exact number would depend on how the twenty-four chromosomes of the parents' egg and sperm cells were divided. When we come to a person who is one-sixteenth something, we should expect to have three chromosomes from each great-grandparent—but the chance of having none rises greatly. Indeed, as soon as we get back to a level at which there are more ancestors than chromosomes (this is six generations back) the odds turn against the possibility that one possesses genes from *any* individual ancestor. Those persons who pride themselves on a single Mayflower ancestor some ten generations back have little chance of possessing anything biologically inherited from him. The genes of such a person are present in the population—but so dispersed that none of his known descendants can claim with any high probability even one of his forty-eight chromosomes. (There is one exception: a male in the direct male line of descent possesses the chromosome for maleness—this chromosome however seems

to be particularly deficient in other genetic material.)

WITH increasing knowledge about genes, almost all the criteria traditionally used for the classification of races has been thrown into question. Such characteristics as skin color, hair color and texture, shape of skull, stature, and other favorites, it became clear, are dependent on very complicated gene mechanisms. They had been selected in the first place because it was believed they were unchanging and stable from generation to generation—that they were, in other words, "non-adaptive," and did not vary according to different environmental conditions. This is an important criterion for the classification of racial traits. For if some physical trait is "adaptive" and hence gives the organism a special advantage in survival in a specific environment, then this adaptive feature will soon spread through a population, and it will be impossible to tell whether two populations, one of which has this trait and the other not, are different in biological origin, or have simply experienced recent rapid changes. To take a simple example: if the leopard does not change his spots, we can always tell a leopard, no matter where he is. Suppose however some leopards wander into an environment in which they are very easily seen by their enemies because of their spots. We might then expect, if a few leopards are born by accident (mutations) without spots, to find the rise of a new group of leopards without spots. Now if we are interested in the racial history of the leopard, and believe the spots are non-adaptive, we may well mistakenly consider two closely related populations of spotted and unspotted leopards as being distinct.

So, then, the classic indexes of physical anthropology were assumed to be non-adaptive. Skulls in particular were highly favored—perhaps because their very hardness suggested their unchangingness, but, more important, because we could collect skulls from centuries back and reconstruct racial history. But skulls, the skeleton in general, hair color and texture, have all tumbled as useful classifying devices. There is the famous case of the head shapes of children of American immigrants which the late Franz Boas showed were quite different from those of their parents. These findings have been challenged; but another Columbia University anthropologist, H. L. Shapiro, has shown definitely that similar changes have oc-

*A full discussion of all the complications and fascinations in human heredity can be found in *The New You and Heredity*, by Amram Scheinfeld, New York, Lippincott, 1950.

curred in the head shapes of children of Japanese immigrants to Hawaii, and it is now well established that the shapes of the head, which once seemed to be the key to racial history, can be affected in a single generation by environmental changes. Besides, there has been a long-range change in Europe from longheads to roundheads. This has been interpreted as a creeping insidious invasion of the roundheads by some anthropologists—but it is likely it is a response to some evolutionary advantage conferred by the roundhead, and tells us nothing about the racial history of an assumed round-headed race.

Skin color would not seem to be subject to this stricture. Negroes transported to America have probably lightened only because of mixture with whites. There are certain facts—for example, the fact that the original homes of dark-skinned races are in regions where there is the most and strongest sunlight—which suggest the operation of an environmental factor of selection over a very long period of time. Yet skin color has stood up rather better than skull form as a criterion for race under modern criticism.

But aside from the question of whether such traits as skull shape and color are adaptive is the fact that their genetic constituents are actually quite complicated and as yet unraveled. This makes them hazardous as criteria for the setting up of races—if, that is, our concern with races is not simple classification but classification based on heredity. Without knowing their specific genetic mechanism, for example, we have little or no idea whether we should expect high, medium, or low rates of mutation.

Mutation—together with environmental selection—is one of the necessary conditions for biological variation and evolution. Under normal conditions, the gene is passed on through reproductive processes and duplicates itself in each generation. But occasionally this self-duplicating process fails; the failure of a gene to reproduce its facsimile is called a mutation. In general, mutation is a random process and takes place independently of the “needs” or “desires” of the organism. The rate of mutation varies both with the organism and with particular genes within the organism. By experimental and mathematical analysis it has been possible to calculate accurate mutation rates for a small number of genes in man. (J. B. S. Haldane, in 1935, found that the rate of mutation at which the gene for the more severe type

of hemophilia appears in the London population is about 1 in 50,000 individuals—or one mutation in 100,000 genes—per generation.) Without knowing the rates of mutation for the genes determining the criteria used in race classification (skin color, hair texture, etc.), we cannot ascertain what kind of difference in a population is “normal” and what kind indicates the presence of two or more biologically differentiated groups.

THE principal weaknesses of the classical approach to race classification can be summarized as follows: (1) an uncritical commitment to measurement for measurement’s sake; (2) the unfortunate tendency to change the criteria of racial membership as one goes from group to group, thereby compounding confusion; (3) neglect of the inevitable fact that any increase in the number of different criteria used to determine racial membership will automatically increase the number of races discovered by the investigator; (4) the acceptance of the “blending theory” of inheritance, which set the classical investigator off on the search for “pure” and “ideal” racial types; and (5) a general unawareness of the genetic complexities underlying the transmission of conventional criteria of racial membership, e.g., cephalic index, skin color, hair and eye form, stature, and the like.

These criticisms reflect the gradual shift in biological analysis from what we may call taxonomic-descriptive studies to studies of the hereditary process and the genetic determinants of biological variation. It became clear that men could be divided into biological classes according to the presence, absence, or frequency of certain genes.

Professor William C. Boyd has recently written an important work that is representative of the new approach to the problem in the field of physical anthropology, *Genetics and the Races of Man: An Introduction to Modern Physical Anthropology* (Little, Brown, 1950). Professor Boyd stresses the central idea that every human being is a member of a biological community, and that community constitutes a genetic reservoir or pool from which genes are drawn by mating and reproduction, to be returned to it in the form of offspring. As a result of various “isolating” mechanisms—the social rejection of certain possible mates or geographical isolation—groups develop within the biological community that differ from each

other in the *frequency* of certain genes. According to Boyd, such groups may be called races: "A human race is a population which differs significantly from other populations in regard to the frequency of one or more of the genes it possesses. It is an arbitrary matter which, and how many, gene loci we choose to consider as a significant [racial] 'constellation.'"

How arbitrary it actually is we may see from an extreme example: Suppose we consider a group composed of three brothers and one sister: Tom, Dick, Harry, and Martha. Tom and Martha have blue eyes, dark hair, and belong to blood group A, blood type M, with Rhesus factor Rh plus. Dick and Harry have brown eyes, light hair, and belong to blood group O, blood type N, with Rhesus factor Rh minus. Now consider a chimpanzee with brown eyes, blood group A, blood type M, and Rhesus factor Rh plus. If we take into consideration only the blood and pigmentation factors named above, it follows that Tom and Martha (*homo sapiens*) are more closely related biologically to the chimpanzee (*pan*) than to their brothers Dick and Harry.

Thus if we try to assign a single *individual* to a race on the basis of any fixed feature then we must run into the absurdity of having members of the same family fall into two different races. This absurdity arises whether we use skull measurements, skin color, or certain specific genes to define race—it is only overcome when we accept the fact that the human genetic pool has been so thoroughly stirred that we cannot find single genes that will characterize *all* members of a given population, no matter how isolated, and when we define race, as Boyd does, as a *population* differing in the *frequency* of the presence of a certain gene.

BUT what characteristics are then to be specified in genes if we are to use them to define "race"? The genes defining a *genetic* race must have a high or complete degree of "pentrance": that is, a dominant gene must always produce a specific physical characteristic or effect, and no other. Thus the genes that are expressed in skin color, if usable as criteria, have to express themselves in human beings in all parts of the world and in all climatic conditions. In other words, the genes in question should always be present when the physical characteristic they determine is present, and absent when those characteristics are absent. They should not be influenced in any way by

the growth of the individual organism; otherwise, we might have a gene that defines a race present at one age and absent at another. The gene considered should also have "constant expressivity," that is, there should be no variation in the effect, or characteristic, produced by the gene in different persons. The gene should also be found in both males and females. And the genetic characteristic must be identifiable in more than one population group so that comparisons can be made between different groups.

A number of human genes have been discovered that meet these specifications, and suggest the possibility of an unambiguous classification of race, clearly established on the basis of heredity mechanisms. The best known of these genes are those that manifest themselves in the blood groups A, B, AB, and O, and in the blood types M, N, and MN, the eight Rhesus blood types, and in taste reactions to a chemical substance called phenylthiocarbamide (PTC).

How this mysterious entity, a single gene manifestation, is discovered, is a fascinating subject in itself. In his book Professor Boyd tells the interesting story of how the gene for sensitivity to PTC was discovered. PTC is a chemical substance that most people (about a little under three out of four) declare has an unpleasant or extremely bitter taste, while the remainder claim that it is tasteless. Quite by accident, a debate arose in a chemical laboratory over this difference in reaction to PTC, one person claiming he could taste it, another that it had no taste at all. Subsequently, by testing people in the same biological family, it was discovered that the capacity to taste or not taste this substance is inherited as a rule (though not always) along simple dominant and recessive lines. "Certain groups of people," Professor Boyd reports, "such as the American Indians, seem to consist of nearly 100 per cent tasters, while in other ethnic groups, as in Wales, large numbers of non-tasters, amounting in some cases to more than 50 per cent of the total, may be found."

In the same way, it was possible to isolate the specific genes that determine the blood groups and types. And these, too, show great variation from one human group to another. Let us consider one of the simplest of the genetically determined blood constituents—the blood types A, B, AB, and O, which were discovered by Landsteiner in 1900-1902. People with A type blood react to anti-A serum; with

B type to anti-B serum; with AB type to both; with O type to neither. There are three genes operative to determine blood type; A, B, and O, and both A and B are dominant over O. We can determine the proportion of each gene in various populations, and plot the results on a map. For example, the distribution of B shows a very interesting pattern. The highest proportion is to be found in Central Asia—Mongolia, Sinkiang, Russian Turkestan, Persia, and Northern India. The proportion falls off as we move out from this center, falling to small proportions in the British Isles, Scandinavia, and Spain; and it is not to be found at all in the Americas and most of Australia. Blood type A shows a converse distribution, low in the Asiatic center and high in peripheral regions. The consideration of these and other distributions suggests the specific history by which at some point in the past, human beings had become differentiated into groups which we may (if we wish) call races.

ON the basis of gene frequencies for blood groups and types, Professor Boyd suggests tentatively the following early racial classification: (1) Hypothetical Early American; (2) European (Caucasoid); (3) African or Negroid; (4) Asiatic or Mongoloid; (5) American Indian; (6) Australoid.

Professor Boyd points out what the reader may have surmised, that these races do not differ in any startling way from the older classifications based on skin color, hair form, eye form, cephalic index, lip structure, and so on. He argues, however, that unlike traditional investigators, he began without any concern for culture or geography, and at no time found it necessary to change his criteria from group to group. And yet, applying these uniformly, he arrived at a racial distribution that conforms with what we know at present of the history of mankind. Thus, marked genetic differences divide the natives of Greenland and the aboriginal Americans from the Western Europeans, while it is impossible to draw a sharp geographical dividing line in Eastern Europe between the European (Caucasoid) and the Asiatic (Mongoloid) races. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that the varieties of human beings can be classified by genes more simply and without the many inconsistencies of method and interpretation that encumbered the older methods. And last but not least, we can be confident we know something of the real bio-

logical connections between one group and another.

Professor Boyd's approach opens new vistas in the study of race. For example, the calculation of gene frequencies "throws some light on the probable origin (evolutionary) of the racial differences which we observe at present, and allows us to attempt a historical reconstruction of gene distributions which may have existed in the past. . . ." Newly devised techniques for determining blood groups can, in some instances, be applied to bones and tissues (some work has been done on Egyptian mummies that are over three thousand years old) and we may yet solve some of the mysteries of racial history.

It must be added, however, that no complete theory of racial history on the basis of gene frequencies has yet been developed. Boyd admits, for example, that his scheme of six genetic races makes no provision for the Pacific peoples because they "do not agree in exhibiting any distinctive combination of frequencies of the genes which we have thus far identified." They show affinities with the Australians, the Asiatics, and the Early Americans—in this last, offering some incidental support for the hypothesis of the author of *Kon-Tiki*. However, the discovery of new genes may yet demonstrate a sharp genetic frontier that would make it unlikely that the Polynesians are related to the American Indians. A discovery such as this is likely to be one of the most interesting results of the genetic approach to race.

The notion of a "genetic frontier" demands a few more words. As a matter of fact, we more often find genetic gradients than genetic frontiers—thus, as we advance from region to region we find the proportion of some gene slowly rising or declining. We must arbitrarily decide at which point we set up a frontier and consider that here one race ends and another begins. Indeed, since genes are quite independent of one another, and have different distributions, quite anomalous situations develop. The "Asiatic" or "Mongoloid" blood type can be found far West in Europe—the equally Asiatic or Mongoloid eye-fold (whose genetic mechanism is still unknown) has a more restricted distribution; besides all this, there is no tendency for a person with Asiatic blood to have an Asiatic eye fold—the genes determining either, once introduced into a population by the same group, will have quite distinct histories, for one child may inherit a gene for one character that

his sibling will not. The Indians, on the basis of blood type, form part of the Asiatic race, which may disturb those who have assumed they are the parent Aryans. However, the discovery of new genes may show them linked to European groups, too.*

Another possibility opened up by genetic analysis is that of determining the actual degree of biological relatedness between groups of Jews throughout the world. One researcher, David C. Rife of the Institute of Genetics at Ohio State University, has discovered that Jewish students at Ohio State University have a different frequency of blood group A from Protestant students—but show the same frequency as Jews in Odessa. Other Jewish groups, on the other hand, show very different frequencies of the various blood types from those typical for Jews in Russia and America. Further work along these lines will permit us to determine more accurately than before the biological relationship between different groups of Jews.†

ALTHOUGH Professor Boyd uses blood groups and types to illustrate his argument, he is quick to point out that blood-group analysis alone will not necessarily offer any unique advantage in racial classification. The advantage,

* Sizeable differences in the frequencies of different blood types have also been shown to exist in two castes in Bombay. Again this is valuable evidence on the question of the origin of castes through racial conquest.

† For a full account of the work along this line to date, see J. D. Brutzkus, "The Anthropology of the Jewish People," in *The Jewish People: Past and Present*, Volume I, New York, 1946.

as such, lies in the fact that we know "the way in which they [blood groups] are inherited, and we possess the reagents which detect the results of the action of nearly every individual gene involved." In time, it is certain that more genes determining human hereditary characteristics will be isolated.

He suggests as one of the advantages of his scheme of racial classification that "in no part of the world does the possession of a blood group A gene, or even an Rh negative gene, exclude a person from the best of society." This may be so, but the history of doctrines of racial and biological superiority gives us little grounds for security on this point. Physical characteristics in themselves play a neutral part in racism; one trait may well be substituted for another, and the prejudices remain.

Indeed, it is fortunate that political considerations play so small a part in Professor Boyd's discussion. Man's cultural achievement, man's beliefs and values, obviously have nothing to do with his race—or rather, we know nothing about the hereditary transmission of genes in human groups as yet that leads us to think there is any connection. The effort to make race and culture coincide has been disastrous, both to the science of physical anthropology and to human welfare. It is to be hoped that in the future the problem of the transmission of genes, and of the relations between different human groups—a problem that has its own intrinsic interest—will remain as carefully delimited as it is now, and not become involved with the task of explaining human character and culture.

LETTERS FROM READERS

Beyond Containment To . . . ?

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Since the publication of my article "Beyond Containment to Liberation" (September 1951), I have received a most striking lesson in the American practice of democracy.

If in Yugoslavia between two wars I had published such an article dealing with an institution I was working with, the article would have been censored before publication, my family and I would have been ostracized, and I would have had to give up my position. When during the last war, in New York, I started to write the truth about the royal government-in-exile of Yugoslavia, I was promptly transferred to Argentina. . . . In line with that experience, I had even felt it necessary, to save mutual embarrassment, to resign my job in the National Committee for a Free Europe in advance of writing and publishing the article.

But the Americans in charge of the NCFE ordered reprints of my article, which contained severe criticism of some of the Committee's policies, and forwarded it with an accompanying letter, signed by Dr. L. Tyson, the new Director of Intellectual Activities, to all European associates and "stipendists" working there! The letter did not carry any criticism or personal remark against me. Such an extraordinary—from the European point of view—treatment of my criticism certainly astonished, to say the least, my European associates, as it did me too, I must admit. It was also, needless to say, most inspiring. . . .

BOGDAN RADITSA

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The article by Mr. Raditsa, "Beyond Containment to Liberation," in the September COMMENTARY, raises a number of questions regarding (1) the activities of Central and Eastern European exiles in this country; (2) American efforts to help them; and (3) the whole nature of American foreign policy.

The first question is: Who are the exiles? Are they all democrats? Do they represent the wishes of their countrymen? If so, to what extent? Or are they, too often for American taste, little despots trying to buttress in this country a small exile-empire of exile-subjects in order, one

happy day, to return to power in their home countries on the coat-tails of an American Army of Liberation?

If the underlying cause of antagonism between the exiles and their American friends is the difference with which they approach the problem of the fight against Communism, and if we want to eliminate that antagonism, we must understand why the difference in approach exists.

As their parents and grandparents did before them, the exiles have lived with and gained strength in perpetuating ancient rivalries, nationalisms, separatisms, particularisms. . . . What plan have the Yugoslav exiles for liberating their country? Or is their only plan to wait for someone else to do it? Are they doing anything more drastic to gain their independence than to publish a bulletin, discuss and debate the past and future of Yugoslavia endlessly over the coffee cups, and criticize American policy? What are they doing to unite their own national and political groups so that they can speak in the name of a future free democratic Yugoslavia? . . .

As to the exile's seasoned understanding of Communism, let us assume that that seasoned understanding exists. Let us at the same time ask if the exile has a seasoned understanding also of the anti-democratic forces which arose during the inter-war years, contributing to political disorganization and thus making it that much easier for Communism to come into power. For example, do the Yugoslav exiles have a seasoned understanding of the reasons why the majority of Yugoslavs did not support Mikhailovitch? Do they have a seasoned understanding of democracy? It is much easier to be a seasoned anti-Communist than to be a seasoned democrat.

We agree that the great revolution of Eastern Europe is the right of the people freely to choose their own national states within the European community. But applying this goal to the Croat, Serb, and Slovene exiles, how many of them would be willing to join hands again in revitalizing the Yugoslav idea? How many of them would rather set up their own little national state of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, within the European community? . . . How many are willing to forego sovereignty and rivalries? As a matter of fact, among the Yugoslav exiles we are faced with as many advocates of a pan-Serbia

as we are for a pan-Croatia or a pan-Slovenia. Who among them will sacrifice his position for a "just national power" and for "government by the consent of the governed" in order to establish a democratic order? . . .

To say that you are anti-Communist is not enough. Present the Americans with some vision of a democratic future for mid-Europe, planned by the people who demand it and are willing to fight for it and live for it, as well as to die for it! . . .

Alice P. Evans

Sacramento, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Mr. Raditsa has written a brilliant article in which he has undoubtedly expressed the opinion of the majority of exiles from East Europe, particularly of our younger group. Very often we are not only forgotten by the Free Europe organization but our ideals are not understood. Our foremost young liberals are never considered; the only ones who seem to have a chance are those reactionaries in exile. Huge sums of money are invested in a great many defunct causes, while the people of Europe await America's message of democracy.

This struggle should be followed, and only Americans who have a thorough knowledge of Communism should be selected for responsible positions in the Free Europe organization.

Dr. Dinko N. Suljak

Editor, *American-Croatian Herald*
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Mr. Bodgan Raditsa's brilliant and challenging article seems to consist of two main parts: The first is a gross misstatement of the position held by those whom he ironically dubs "Machiavellian liberals"; in the second he seems to bemoan the fact that American foreign policy is not formulated by exiles from behind the Iron Curtain. Having come to this country as a refugee myself, I heartily sympathize with Mr. Raditsa's frustrated feelings. . . .

But the obstacle which Mr. Raditsa encounters is neither apathy nor an erroneous conception of the enemy, as he seems to believe; rather, it is his own misconception of the working mechanism which determines American policy. The American government has left it to Mr. Raditsa and his unfortunate fellow exiles to convince the country of their point of view, to raise funds for their cause, and to propagandize us, the world at large, and their home country in particular. Moreover, it went out of its way to place at his disposal a radio station and also made sure that he met the "right kind of people" whose support is so essential for

fund-raising and other campaigns, as well as the all-important personal contacts. . . .

What Mr. Raditsa really wants is not the chance to propagandize (which he has even without asking) and to break out of the self-imposed "insulation," but a more active share in the crusade here and abroad, to wit, a share which he does not have to cut out for himself but which the United States government should assign to him. Now, this cannot be done, for two reasons. Judging by my own experience, being in the employ of the United States government might do Mr. Raditsa more political harm in his country than it would benefit him in terms of facilities at his disposal; the work which he proposes to do must essentially be performed by nationals with the help of like-minded citizens and organizations abroad. . . . Moreover, the United States government cannot give its official blessing to the kind of disruptive propaganda campaign which any resistance movement must try to conduct. Just as the resistance movement may, at times and rather more than less often, have to disclaim any responsibility for the policy and pronouncements of a sympathetic foreign government, so the State Department may not like to assume responsibility for actions Mr. Raditsa might consider necessary, even though it might find such actions helpful in their way. This mutual independence which benefits both parties concerned would be impaired by formal recognition. . . .

The American government, so far, has not thought fit to retaliate in kind for the subversive activities of the Kremlin's agents in the United States; it is not in the business of subverting foreign governments. Its business is the defense of this country, and as long as we are not at war, this means diplomacy. . . . Mr. Raditsa writes as though we already were at war and the United States government was reluctant to make the best use of the liberation movements. Such an attitude terrifies me just as much as my approach may horrify Mr. Raditsa; in fact, I would not be writing this reply if I were not saddened by the fact that so many of the best people accept war as inevitable. They seem to have turned the famous dictum of Clausewitz topside down: for them, diplomacy seems to be, at least, the pursuit of war with different weapons. To me, war still is the admission that diplomacy has failed. . . .

Henry M. Pachter

New York City

Unitarianism and Mr. Daiches

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As a Unitarian I could not help being amused at Mr. David Daiches in his excellent

letter to COMMENTARY (November 1951). Perhaps his observations on Unitarians apply to those in England, but not to those in America.

Mr. Daiches speaks of what "the Unitarian believes." There is nothing that can be called "the" Unitarian belief on religion; there are only beliefs of various Unitarians. Specifically, he maintains that all one requires to be a Unitarian is a belief in one God. Perish the thought!

Unitarianism is a non-creedal faith which, it happens, did have its origin in a dispute over whether God is Three or One; but this question has not bothered American Unitarians for a century or so. Among our number are included theists, naturalists, humanists, and self-proclaimed atheists. Instead of rallying around a creed—a group of fixed and final answers—as do most other Christians, we rally about a process by which each individual Unitarian arrives at his own answers according to his knowledge, background, conscience, and personal experience. We do not necessarily consider our beliefs a modification of Christianity. Some regard their beliefs as a return to the basic beliefs of the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus; while others—including myself—do not care whether we are called Christian or not.

But what most amused me was Mr. Daiches's proclamation that our first duty to ourselves and to others is intellectual honesty divorced from self-love or pride, and statement that he is in the deepest sense an agnostic. Bravo! This, it strikes me, is much more in the Unitarian tradition (though by no means exclusively Unitarian) than the question of the unity versus the trinity of the Godhead. Mr. Daiches, were it not for his Jewish heritage and his admirable love for that heritage, would doubtless make a good Unitarian.

COMMENTARY continues excellent. Please keep it that way.

J. H. PENIX

Jackson, Mississippi

Arming Our Children Against Anti-Semitism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Bruno Bettelheim's article ("How Arm Our Children Against Anti-Semitism?" in the September COMMENTARY) is the best thing that I have read on the subject.

The difficulty I find in implementing Dr. Bettelheim's thesis is that it would seem to require the proper emotional and mental conditioning not only of all of the Jewish children before they have reached their fourth year, but of the children included in the world's population. Then, one is confronted in the restricted Jewish area with the vicious circle that parents

are called upon to rid themselves of their own anxieties before they can deal with their children. But how are the parents to do that when they themselves have not had the proper conditioning before reaching their fourth year?

DAVID FICHMAN

Executive Secretary

New Orleans Jewish Welfare Fund

New Orleans, Louisiana

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I believe Bruno Bettelheim did Kurt Lewin an injustice when he described him as "a distinguished proponent" of the idea that "group belongingness" can best be attained by having children educated in parochial schools. After reading Bettelheim's article I was moved to re-examine Lewin's position as set forth in his paper "Bringing up the Jewish Child" (in *Resolving Social Conflicts*). While their formulations and emphasis are no doubt different, the gulf between them, as I see it, is not unbridgeable.

Unlike so much of his other work, Lewin's paper was not written for the professional psychologist. On the contrary, it was intended as guidance for parents. Although he stressed the need for group belongingness, he did not point to any specific path to that end. He realized that some would find it in the parochial school, some in the synagogue, some in family ritual, others in the dietary laws, and perhaps still others in Zionism, language, folk music, or humor. . . .

That this is the correct interpretation to be put on Lewin's work can be seen from the fact that nowhere in the article does he mention the parochial school as the solution to the problem. He concedes the ambiguity of Jewishness and holds that, whether Judaism be conceived as a religion, race, nationality, or culture, children must be armed against anti-Semitism. . . . In short, Lewin urges the Jewish parent to acknowledge his Jewishness, and by some means to foster in his children the sense that they are members of a less privileged minority. A child so reared might, incidentally, be as familiar with "Jew" as was Dr. Bettelheim's daughter with "shoe" and would know that her friends called her "a Jew" because she was in fact a Jew.

While Dr. Bettelheim grants that the individual gains immeasurably from the sense of security that results from belonging to the larger Jewish group, he goes on to argue that the key to the problem lies in rearing emotionally stable children by establishing security and self-respect within the family group, thus creating the impression that the two views are mutually exclusive. The conclusions of Lewin's research

on the effect of harmonious and democratic relationships in the home, school, and factory, bear witness to the fact that he too would place primary emphasis on parental care, warmth, love, protection, etc. What he is asserting is that these are necessary but not sufficient ways to arm children against anti-Semitism.

Dr. Bettelheim grants too that "the older Jewish child, at the proper time, must be educated openly and realistically" about anti-Semitism. While Lewin urges parents to develop the sense of belongingness "very early," Dr. Bettelheim, on the other hand, believes that any attempt "to explain matters to the satisfaction of the young child may actually have mischievous consequences." The difference, for the most part, therefore, seems to be one of timing. Bettelheim's "proper time" appears to come later than Lewin's "early age." And yet neither one is wholly right because in each instance what steps to take and when to take them would depend upon the nature of the community and the problems faced by the child in his daily activities. There is, then, no universal principle which can be applied blindly without regard to the facts in the case. . . .

JULES KOLODNY

Brooklyn, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Since Dr. Bruno Bettelheim's advice to Jewish parents, in the September COMMENTARY, was intended at least in part as a refutation of the position of Kurt Lewin and other advocates of a positive Jewish environment for children, it may be appropriate to examine some of the underlying differences between the two points of view. . . .

Drastically oversimplified, Lewin's position on the issue in question may be outlined roughly as follows: Jewish children are born into a group characterized by a common past and to a certain extent a common future, with both positive and negative implications deriving from their Jewish identification. The positive aspects include the potential inheritance of a rich culture and literature, and the opportunity for identification with the Jewish people and their various institutions; the negative aspects include the underprivileged status of a minority group member, and the harsh realities of discrimination. If, in such a situation, Jewish group membership is experienced only in its negative aspect, and its positive values are ignored or denied, then the individual would appear likely to look upon his Jewishness as an unwelcome burden, and to meet prejudice with greater or less frustration and inner conflict. If, on the other hand, Jewish children are surrounded by a positive Jewish "atmosphere" in their developing

years, then their Jewishness should become a source of personal enrichment and satisfaction and any slights suffered on that account would be met with greater confidence and security. . . .

Dr. Bettelheim appears to proceed from a different premise regarding Jewish identification. Starting with the assumption that much of Jewish participation and activity derives from the "supreme motivation" of self-defense, he questions the feasibility of strengthening the group belongingness of Jewish children on the basis of the "unalterable reality" of cultural integration for many Jews, and the inevitable fears of children of being in any respect different from others. . . .

In addition to questioning whether it is possible to "contrive" the kind of group identification envisaged by the advocates of positive Jewish education, Dr. Bettelheim goes so far as to question whether it would be *desirable* in any case, apparently feeling that "belongingness" may be too high a price to pay for immunity to prejudice. The exact basis of this doubt is not made clear.

To be sure, the foregoing references to certain aspects of Dr. Bettelheim's discussion do not in any way do justice to the many psychological insights and penetrating observations that comprise the bulk of his paper. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is little positive valuation of Jewish culture or identification *per se* to be found in his analysis, and that herein may lie the basis of his inability to accept Lewin's arguments. . . .

SIDNEY E. ZIMBALIST

Assistant Professor
School of Social Work
Washington University

St. Louis, Missouri

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I am truly grateful for the article "How Arm Our Children Against Anti-Semitism?" in the September issue of COMMENTARY.

In my view, Dr. Bettelheim's essay has not only great intrinsic merit as a solid and thoroughly scientific treatment of the subject, but renders a first-class public service of enlightenment to the Jewish community. It did my heart good to see how he demolished the late Kurt Lewin's views, which are, to my mind, false in theory and harmful in practice, being all too facile and panacea-promising.

The reference to anti-Semitism as a "psychological necessity" to the Jew is as timely as it is profoundly true. I am convinced that in the interests of Jewish mental health and rational living, this must be said again and again.

L. MELAMED

Johannesburg, South Africa

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Is This Jewish Humor?

A TREASURY OF JEWISH HUMOR. Edited by NATHAN AUSUBEL. Doubleday. 735 pp. \$5.00.

Reviewed by DAVID DAICHES

IN compiling this massive anthology—and himself translating many of its items from the Yiddish—Mr. Ausubel has undertaken a heroic task, perhaps more heroic than he realized. A book as large as this, and bearing the title which this bears, ought to be a reasonably definitive collection of stories illustrative of characteristically Jewish humor. The most important preliminary task for an editor of this kind of work is surely to make up his mind about what Jewish humor is. That Jewish humor exists, is hardly to be questioned. Or rather, that Jewish humor existed. Many of the modern funny stories about Jews which Mr. Ausubel includes in his book are just funny stories that happen to be about Jews: they are not specially or essentially Jewish. Fewer and fewer of the new stories about Jews are essentially Jewish. For Jewish humor, so far as it can be clearly differentiated from other kinds of humor, is a product of the ghetto, and bears in its philosophy as well as in its idiom the marks of a “peculiar people” who are both proud and ironical about their peculiarity, who have developed a sad secular wisdom against a background of minute and daily religious observance, who always expect the worst while maintaining a teasing and quizzical familiarity with the Almighty. The great period of Jewish humor was the period between the Enlightenment and assimilation—the period, that is, when Jews were still Yiddish-speaking and ghetto-dwelling, but after the stern conviction of unquestioned faith had been modified in response to the infiltration of skepticism. Zangwill’s Melchisedek Pinchas, one of the last comic characters in a Jewish literature now no longer written in Yiddish, could not have existed in the Middle Ages and could not exist today.

Sholom Aleichem’s Menachem Mendel belongs even more completely to a lost world.

One looks in vain in Mr. Ausubel’s arrangement of his selections and in his often acute comments for any awareness of the state of unstable equilibrium which produced the most characteristically Jewish humor. For him, Jewish humor seems to be timeless and permanent (one wonders, then, why it is not to be found in the Hebrew Bible), to be classified thematically in terms of the different subjects with which it deals rather than chronologically in terms of the development, flourishing, and passing away of the special situation in which it flowered. Thus in the section entitled “A Dash of Vinegar” he includes Peretz’s story “The Little Hanukkah Lamp” and Alfred Adler’s remark (quoted as an item in itself) that “It is easier to fight for one’s principles than to live up to them” (Jewish humor??). He gives us both Aaron Ogus’s finely ironical little story “The Shofar Blower of Lapinshok” and Lion Feuchtwanger’s very differently ironical “Balance Sheet of My Life.” We get Bialik’s superb story “The Short Friday” (absolutely Yiddish in style and subject, and redolent of the ghetto, though written in Hebrew) and Louis Untermeyer’s “parody in the manner of Edw-n Markh-m” about Einstein:

*We drew our circle that shut him out,
This man of Science who dared our doubt.
But ah, with a fourth-dimensional grin
He squared a circle that took us in.*

I know that both Untermeyer and Einstein are Jewish, but that doesn’t make a poem by Untermeyer about Einstein an example of Jewish humor. And I cannot for the life of me see why Dorothy Parker’s little poem “Résumé” is included in an anthology of Jewish humor, even if Dorothy Parker was born a Rothschild. Sometimes I think that Mr. Ausubel believes that irony in any form is a Jewish monopoly and any ironical remark must be an example of Jewish humor.

Most humorous Jewish short stories are naturally about Jews, but not all humorous short

stories about Jews are necessarily humorous in an essentially Jewish way. Arthur Kober, for example, is humorous *about* Jews—humorous in a grim and critical way—but the humor of his stories is anything but Jewish. Bella Gross may embody with considerable brilliance the vulgarities and frustrations of lower-middle-class American Jewish life, but her saga is neither essentially Jewish nor essentially humorous. At least, if it is to be regarded as essentially Jewish the onus lies on the editor (who writes fairly long and chatty introductory comments to each section) to differentiate it from other kinds of Jewish humor and to point out its origin in a special phase of American Jewish life. But instead of that Mr. Ausubel puts “A Letter from the Bronx” in his section on “Love,” which is preceded by a discussion of the Jewish attitude to love and marriage that seems to assume that that attitude is constant and stable or at least that all the stories he includes in this section are equally illustrative of his generalizations. “Love is a fine thing, but love with noodles is even tastier.” This theme may indeed run through all Jewish stories about love, but the differences between Hatvany-Deutsch’s sophisticated central European irony, Z. Wendroff’s traditional fun at the expense of *shadchans*, and Leon Kobrin’s oddly convincing account of the elderly Reb Mottel’s falling in love with the pretty girl lodger—the differences are more striking and more significant than any resemblances. Only the second, I should say, is funny in an essentially Jewish way.

Jewish humor at its most authentic arose from the clash between a vocabulary geared to a life of religious observance and a deeply ironical practical skepticism: as the latter comes more and more to dominate the former, the humor becomes less and less specifically Jewish, and when finally we get the Western Jewish intellectual playing his part as an ironist in a sophisticated Western community, the Jewish ties are generally lost altogether. (Heine, it is true, managed to preserve those ties, but, in spite of everything, Heine was emotionally closer to the ghetto than most of his modern equivalents.) I do not want to chide Mr. Ausubel for not having produced the kind of book he clearly never set out to produce, but I do wish that in his comments and in the organization of his material he could have given the reader some sense of this movement. Surely we are confusing the issue if we put a love lyric by Judah Halevi next to a story about *shadchans* by a late 19th-

century Yiddish writer as examples of Jewish humor about love! And a mother-in-law joke does not become Jewish by being set in a rabbi’s study.

I AM disturbed also by a tendency in the collection to degenerate into a mere jokebook. (Incidentally, this tendency was also noted by Isaac Rosenfeld in his review of Mr. Ausubel’s *Treasury of Jewish Folklore* in the November 1948 issue of COMMENTARY.) I suppose that an anthology of Jewish humor ought to include Jewish jokes, but surely the best example of each kind should be chosen. The jokes which fill up odd spaces on the page in this volume are for the most part pretty shabby, and in many cases I have heard better examples of their kind. In any case, there is hardly a Jewish joke whose point is not more effectively illustrated in more extended treatment in some Yiddish short story. Jewish humor is discursive and argumentative, and the snappy two-line version of an anecdote often squeezes out much of its essential flavor. Often the humor lies in the sheer discursiveness, reflecting the traditional Jewish awareness of the ironical contrast between the subtleties of discourse and the hard facts of life—a contrast of which the *Talmud chochem* of the ghetto must have been very much aware. The *kal v’chomer* joke, for example (using the Talmudic *a fortiori* argument from the less to the greater: if for one, then so much the more so for two), is dialectical and discursive in nature, and its point often lies in the awareness it displays of the difference between the flexibility and subtlety of argument on the one hand and the irresistible nature of facts on the other. A repressed minority bred on Talmud disputation would naturally cultivate this kind of humor: yet I do not remember a single example of it in Mr. Ausubel’s anthology.

In spite of these limitations, however, Mr. Ausubel has produced an impressive work, which includes many pieces translated from the Yiddish (as far as I know) for the first time. His own translations are fluent, though not always discriminating in the use of modern American slang to render a Yiddish term or expression, and must have involved a great deal of labor. The core of the book consists of the translations from late 19th- and early 20th-century Yiddish writers, but there are also translations from Hebrew, German, and other languages and a fair sprinkling of modern American Jewish writers. If from one point of

view Mr. Ausubel's range is so great as to obscure the differentiating qualities of Jewish humor, from another it must be conceded that it extends the scope of his volume and gives the reader the opportunity to read something of Heine and Hermann Hieijermans and César Tiempo as well as of Peretz and Sholom Aleichem. But the greatest of these is Sholom Aleichem.

Jews and the Arab World

CAIRO TO DAMASCUS. By JOHN ROY CARLSON. Knopf. 474 pp. \$4.50.

ETERNAL STRANGER: THE PLIGHT OF THE MODERN JEW FROM BAGHDAD TO CASABLANCA. By LAWRENCE RESNER. Doubleday. 207 pp. \$3.00.

Reviewed by GEORGE Z. GOLDBERG

IN THE Arab-Islamic world of North Africa and the Middle East live more than 800,000 Oriental Jews, who have only recently attracted the attention of Western Jews. Caught between the declining influence of the Europeans and the rising nationalism and independence of the Arabs, these Jewish communities have little means of any sort to protect themselves against a nationalism that looks upon them as foreigners or as agents of Israel, and they can hardly expect aid from the Western powers that are themselves desperately working to retain at least a vestige of influence.

It is this group of Jews and the Arab-Moslem world in which they live that are the subjects of these two timely books. In *Eternal Stranger*, Lawrence Resner, a former New York Times reporter, gives a first-hand account of the condition and status of the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East. In *Cairo to Damascus*, John Roy Carlson, investigator of totalitarian groups in the United States and author of *Under Cover*, extends his studies of extremist groups to the Arab Middle East. Together, these two books present a picture of unmitigated poverty, reaction, and despair; one concentrates upon the misery of the Jews, the other upon the backwardness of the Arabs—and of course there is plenty of both. The trouble is that we have so little reliable information about the Arab world and its Jewish communities that such one-sided reporting only intensifies our prejudices.

Mr. Carlson is especially at fault. When he

writes a book like *Under Cover* or *The Plotters*, dealing with fascists or Communists in the United States, there is no danger that American readers will consider the country to be peopled only by extremists. But when he gives American readers an account of Middle Eastern affairs in which he shows nothing but the lunatic fringe, he is merely blocking instead of facilitating an appreciation of his subject. "I have written this book," he says, "with the hope that it will bring both the Arabs and the Jews into truer focus for the reader." Mr. Carlson's hope is in vain. His focus shows the Arabs as entirely incapable of anything decent, and the Israelis of anything bad or wrong; indeed he is one of those uncritical admirers of Israel whose simple faith must inevitably be embarrassing even to the Israelis.

The investigations reported in *Cairo to Damascus* began in London, where Mr. Carlson, posing as a "typical well-fed American businessman," met rabble-rousers, anti-Semites, and the British pro-Arab extremists. He went to the Middle East in March 1948, and for six months mingled with Arab extremists in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Mr. Carlson represented himself, among the Arabs, pretty much as what he really is: a Christian American of Armenian parents. But he added one trait, a simulated hatred for Jews, that eased his way into the confidence of the Egyptian extremists. He was so successful that one lunatic-fringe group asked him to serve as photographer for their guerrilla unit fighting the Jews in Palestine.

His account of the fighting in Palestine, which he saw from both the Arab and the Jewish sides, is indeed the best section of Mr. Carlson's book. In relating his experiences on both sides of the battle line he gives the reader several enjoyable chapters of good adventure and human interest. But one cannot say that much for the rest of the book, which is full of the aimless trivialities that frequently clutter books by journalists, professional travelers, and soldiers of fortune.

Mr. Carlson does manage to communicate the tenseness of the Arabs, the backwardness of their social order, and the anti-Western sentiment that extends beyond the extremists with whom he associated. He communicates, too, his own ability to win the confidence of the lunatic fringe and his own facility in acquiring the feel of life in Cairo. He learned more Arabic words and phrases in six months than

some journalists or diplomats learn in six years. It is really a pity that so much ingenuity and daring—Mr. Carlson, by his own account, seems to have daily escaped a beating or murder—has been expended on so inconsequential and one-sided a book.

MR. RESNER'S is a more substantial work. The author visited French Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, among the more important countries he discusses in this book, but did not get to the Arab League countries of the Middle East. He nevertheless treats all the countries with the same mixture of fact and anecdote. That his chapters on the places he visited are no more informative than his accounts of the Jews in the countries he did not personally cover is evidence of his ability to use secondary materials—and of his somewhat limited capacity as an observer.

By sheer repetition Mr. Resner gets across the simple fact that most of the 800,000 Jews in the Moslem world are desperately poor, backward, and the objects of a discrimination and persecution before which they are virtually helpless. The legacy of centuries of Islamic theocracy is, for the Jews, a semi-autonomous status that has varied from tolerance (in return for the payment of special taxes and accompanied by isolation and certain forms of discrimination) to outright physical attack, especially in recent years. Traditional Islamic toleration of the Jews as "The People of the Book" meant that Jews could preserve their identity during the first Arab-Moslem sweeps across the Middle East and North Africa, instead of being killed or forcibly converted. Over the centuries, however, this form of "protected" status has meant steady subjection of Jews to degrading and often inhuman treatment.

Within this general pattern, as Mr. Resner shows, the status of the Jews has varied according to the degree that secular and Western influences have touched the Moslem countries. The Jews of Algeria, who enjoy full French citizenship, are far more advanced than those of Morocco, a protectorate in which France has done less to advance the legal and social position of the Jews. Mr. Resner makes clear the dilemma that the Jews face in French-controlled North Africa. They fear to rely on the European power because that would irritate the Arab nationalists. They cannot really seek "integration" into their Arab-Moslem environment—such a concept is not even understood in lands

that are still virtual theocracies. Besides, it was in Egypt and Iraq, where the Jews had come closest to "integration" in the Western sense, that they suffered the greatest blows to their physical, psychological, and economic security during the Palestine crisis and since the establishment of the State of Israel. The French, too, are in a dilemma. They hesitate to show special concern for the welfare of the Jews for fear of stimulating the already troublesome Arab nationalist, anti-foreign movements. As for Israel, it is difficult to see how it can absorb in the near future the hundreds of thousands of Jews who, many people (including Mr. Resner) assume, want to and must emigrate there. Jews in the Moslem countries are probably no worse or better off today than they have been for centuries. But if *they* haven't moved, the outside world has. The Jewish state in Israel offers these masses of Jews some hope and that makes the virtually hopeless situation less tolerable.

While Mr. Resner discusses most of these difficult questions with some understanding, his analysis does not go very deep. His concern seems mainly to show us the misery of the Jewish communities in the Arab-Moslem world, instead of to give a rounded picture that would include consideration of those who live above the level of abject poverty, as well as of the quality of life and culture that these quite various Jewish communities have constructed despite their poverty. He might have done better, too, had he been somewhat more familiar with the traditional Islamic policy toward minorities, including the Jews. Yet, these limitations notwithstanding, *Eternal Stranger* does provide useful information about an area of Jewish life that the West ignored until the destruction of East European Jewry focussed its attention upon forgotten worlds.

Tomorrow's Child

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE. By J. D. SALINGER. Little, Brown. 276 pp. \$3.00.

Reviewed by WILLIAM POSTER

THE hallmark of a certain kind of art, it used to be said, is the shock of recognition. But the fantastically rapid movement of present-day life has altered matters somewhat. Mr. Salinger's novel gives us what amounts to a series of shocks of precognition, quick anticipations

of life presented in a lightly organized cluster. Its most immediate effect is of being magically on top of contemporary life, catching events in the making and plucking phrases right out of the mouth of social history. This febrile power of observation, amounting to a kind of genius, is a trait displayed in much popular American art, a trait manifested not so much in the creation of a single character or work as through an infinite number of small touches fitted into the interstices of popular novels, comic strips, movies, and radio serials. This kind of observation is not, oddly enough, of the naturalistic documentary variety, though a certain quantum of sheer recording ability is involved, nor does it depend primarily on an overwhelming familiarity with an environment. The data go beyond experience and habit to become clues to trend. The peculiarly brilliant effect imparted as one comes across the turn of speech, gesture, or incident that only yesterday seemed to mark a significant change in group mores is due to the slightly eerie sensation one has of finding the future crystallized. It is the natural talent, developed to a preternatural extreme, of entertainers whose most harrowing fear is that of finding themselves suddenly, instantaneously *démodé*, stranded by the unpredictable tides of American taste and predilection.

Thus, the language of Mr. Salinger's sixteen-year-old narrator-protagonist is something of a phenomenon in itself and carries most of the weight of the story: "I was feeling sort of tired from the trip to New York and all, and I started yawning. Then I started horsing around a little bit. Sometimes I horse around quite a lot, just to keep from getting bored. What I did was, I pulled the old peak of my hunting hat around to the front, then pulled it way down over my eyes. That way I couldn't see a goddam thing. 'I think I'm going blind,' I said in this very hoarse voice. 'Mother darling, everything's getting so dark in here.'"

It is not merely the current idiom and style of this particular breed of American adolescent that is being rendered but yesterday's or rather today's served up through all the complex processes of writing and publishing as fresh as frozen vegetables. It is a *tour de force* the American fiction writer will probably find himself increasingly doomed to attempt if he does not wish to lag behind, much as the designer of military airplanes has to shape his plans to meet future rather than present conditions. Mr. Salinger's extended, perfectionist handling of

contemporary idiom is indeed the literary equivalent of our time-defying technological innovations and one which will have far-reaching though not necessarily happy consequences.

Similarly, Mr. Salinger picks up his narrating hero with all the intimate ease and bounce of a comic-strip artist and carries him through the incidents typical of his milieu in a thin, adroit fashion that seems able, effortlessly, to maintain itself forever—as long, that is, as the environment holds out. The incidents—and they seem within a narrow compass to contain every adolescent highlight: the bad boy of the school breaking wind in assembly, brushes with a homosexual and a prostitute, an awkward fight between roommates, embarrassing intimacies with a teacher—are of a different kind from those that are permitted in our mass entertainments. Nevertheless, what fundamentally distinguishes *The Catcher in the Rye* from such comic strips as *Our Bill* and *Penny*, with which it has much in common, is not superior depth but a different kind of selectivity and a different set of conventions.

The machinery of the comic strip is geared to churn the life of the average American into a pure froth of light amusement, and its artifices are the result of mutual understanding between the audience and the creator and necessary to the effect. The machinery of novels like Mr. Salinger's is tooled to turn out supposedly unique heroes, fashionable departures from current norms who arouse envy and admiration through the author's advertisement of virtues of sensibility and intransigence which in fact they do not possess. Money, looks, "background," and a petty scrape or two are neatly blended to shape an imitation Byronic rebel. In the comic strip the audience is in on the rules of the game and identified with the character; in the novel the audience is excluded and tricked. Both phenomena result from the American failure to integrate and maintain a democratic aesthetic. Our popular arts split up repeatedly into the complementary extremes of mass egalitarianism and pseudo-elite snobbery, with the lower-caste forms having the greater vitality and coherence.

It is the very American, very successful New York upper middle class (or lower upper class—the income bracket is somewhere between thirty and a hundred thousand dollars a year) adolescent prep-school student that Mr. Salinger epitomizes in the person of Holden Caul-

field (the name is an instance of the author's shrewd selectivity). Holden is typical not so much of this adolescent class as a whole, but of a specific and extensive part of it, namely, those individuals who think of themselves as exceptions to the class by virtue of their superior taste. Salinger tries to pass Holden off as tragically isolated through excessive sensibility, but never shows him as in any way distinct from the hordes of crew-cutted, Ivy League *aficionados* who used to turn up at Village jam sessions, thereby playing a large role in the breakdown of a once flourishing school of American music. Holden's disenchantment with the activities of his group, with education, patriotism, school spirit, literature, art, etc., would have some virtue if it had better logic and were not part of an indiscriminately squeamish lack of appetite for any aspect of life whatsoever. It would be easier to credit his detestation of the "phony slob" who surround him if he were distinguished from them in any way but the weakness of his stomach.

Essentially, this negativism derives not so much from social reality as from the predicament of the sophisticated writer nearing the end of his resources. The cool, objective, humorous treatment of contemporary eccentricity which is characteristic of the *New Yorker* (where Mr. Salinger publishes his short stories) has run down because it cannot be recharged from the battery of some viable, positive approach to culture, morals, religion, or politics. Any literary attitude that contains fixed principles of detachment or exclusion is bound to wither in a society that pulls organically in the opposite direction. And *New Yorker* literature suffers not only from the desiccation common to every artificially constituted American elite, but also from some special ailments; the natural objects of its satire have disappeared, partly as a result of social change, partly because so many have become, themselves, *New Yorker* subscribers and exemplars of its approach. The ennui, heartburn, and weary revulsions of *The Catcher in the Rye* are the inevitable emotions, not of an adolescent, however disenchanted, but of a well-paid satirist with a highly developed technique, no point of view, and no target to aim at but himself.

The author's predicament does enable him to project, by a kind of transposition, something of the malaise of those scions of the upper classes who, as a result of excessive wealth, leisure, a secure social position, guilt,

and the debilitated rudiments of sensibility, have nothing further to strive for within their class and cannot accept its usual goals. Lacking the discrimination and vigor necessary to create new forms of life, they can only dream fitfully and unpoetically of implausible escapes. Only Mr. Salinger tries to convince us that Holden's fearfully mawkish and ugly fantasies are the exquisite reveries of a soul tormented by sheer love of the beautiful and genuine, and that a mere prematurely withered casualty of history is one of its nobler tragedies.

Philosopher of Violence

GEORGES SOREL, *PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR*. (Harvard Historical Studies, Volume LIX.) By RICHARD HUMPHREY. Harvard. 311 pp. \$4.00.

Reviewed by PAUL KECSKEMETI

A FEW thinkers in the 19th century had foreseen the coming reversion of politics to a pattern of violence and irrationality; in a complacent and optimistic age, their disillusioned clear-sightedness was exceptional and admirable. Some of these prophets of doom, Jakob Burckhardt for instance, deplored the trend they saw to be in the ascendancy. Others, on the contrary, seemed to welcome it. Georges Sorel, the hero of Mr. Humphrey's volume, is chiefly remembered today as the advocate of physical violence and of irrational myths as the instruments of a superior type of politics. Was he not, then, the intellectual ancestor par excellence of present-day totalitarianism? Mr. Humphrey says no, all appearances to the contrary; and those who study Sorel at first hand will tend to agree that he has a valid case. Sorel did extol both violence and the political myth, but neither of these concepts, as he evolved them, coincides with the totalitarian version of myth and of violence.

What did Sorel actually teach? Since he was not a systematic thinker and shifted his ground almost continually, we cannot propose any brief formula as the essence of Sorelian doctrine. A few dominant attitudes and theses, however, recur constantly in all his work. One of these attitudes is his choking rage against politics and politicians of the Third Republic, particularly of the progressive and socialist brand. To him, a socialist or liberal in politics was a sinister fraud, wanting only to live luxuriously at the expense of the public and,

to do this, deliberately sacrificing the cause he professed to serve. Sorel defined a progressive (and in particular, a socialist) politician as a man who systematically befuddled the minds and debased the mores of his constituents in order to live like a bourgeois. Sorel was indeed, as Mr. Humphrey says, a "moralist" in politics, and a very grouchy and uncharitable one, full of self-righteousness and venom. But he was not merely a puritanical grouch. Another dominant aspect of his personality was his consuming thirst for greatness and sublimity.

Sorel suffered from the smallness of his age. He was haunted, tormented, and inspired by one question: how could the world (to him as a very typical Frenchman, the world meant in reality France) again breathe the pure air of the sublime and heroic? After the rise of Germany and the debacle of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, military glory was out of the question. But there was one field in which epic glory was still to be won, that of social revolution. Here, the Latin peoples, and particularly the French, had a great advantage (if they would only use it) over their German and Anglo-Saxon contemporaries. The proletariat in the Latin countries (as distinct from its despicable political leaders) had a heroic conception of the social struggle, far above the pedestrian bread-and-butter outlook of Anglo-Saxon labor and the bloodless intellectual pedantry of German Marxism. Here was the historical vocation of French syndicalism: it could, if it would, remake the Great Revolution and recapture its glory; doing this, it would also regenerate human civilization.

HISTORY shows, according to Sorel, that such a mission of cultural regeneration depends on two things: on a "myth" filling the soul with a vision of sublime greatness, leaving behind all base everyday interests; and on "violence," that is, readiness to stake one's life in physical combat against an enemy force. Without a myth and war waged in its name, nothing great can be achieved; and without greatness, human culture must perish. In our age, Sorel thought, the only myth capable of inspiring heroic deeds was that of the "general strike," conceived by him as an act of war. What was needed to save culture, then, was an extreme and clear-cut division of society into two hostile camps: proletarians who would fight, not for higher wages but for total liberation—meaning the elimination of bourgeois control; and bour-

geois who would take up the challenge and also fight to the death, not for profit but for power. To the devil with those who gloss things over and preach social justice and co-operation among classes! They, the soft-hearted bourgeois liberals and the conciliatory socialist politicians, were the enemies of mankind. The only "good" people were those who would deepen the class conflict to the utmost. The real proletarians must be blasphemers against all bourgeois ideals, just as the early Christians were blasphemers against the emperor-God. They must deny patriotism and the flag; they must reject the idea of nation. The Sorel who said this was, at the same time, an ardent French nationalist; but this is how his mind worked. He was always inconsistent, but always for the sake of consistency.

Enough has been said to show that in their Sorelian setting, neither violence nor myth has a totalitarian character. Violence to him did not mean terror; it meant a heroic and chivalrous war against combatants on the other side. This war, he believed, would not involve great destruction and loss of life; the victims would be few but illustrious. And once victory was won, the lives and dignity of the vanquished would be spared. No reign of terror would be instituted; only politicians, Sorel declared, were capable of the baseness of police and judicial terrorism. And as to the "myth," it had nothing to do with mass indoctrination. The Sorelian myth was a dream welling up from the depth of the soul spontaneously, involving neither coercion nor manipulation from above. The final consummation of the great regenerative war, Sorel thought, would be a sublime era in which the "producers," having achieved their freedom, would organize society on an anarchic, individualist, and cooperative basis.

This is, as we see, an intellectual edifice of heroic proportions, built in the grand style. It is also built, alas, on thin air, without a solid basis in reality. Sorel lived long enough to see that regeneration-through-war, as he conceived it, was not for this world, and he recognized that whatever inspired the French proletariat of his day, it was not his myth. For a while he thought that his myth had at last become reality in the Russian Revolution, and he saluted Lenin dithyrambically. But Soviet reality, too, disabused him.

SOREL was a pathetic, great, lonely figure. Absurd in his petulance and his enthusiasm alike,

he was a "pure fool," he was single-minded in his devotion to the ideal of regenerating mankind through greatness. The last thing we can say about him is that he had insights about political reality that were valid for his time and ours.

But this is precisely what Mr. Humphrey would have us believe. He calls Sorel a "prophet of our age," along with Nietzsche and Freud, arguing somewhat along the following lines: Explosive and destructive energy, as symbolized by the atomic bomb, is the basic fact of our time. Among pre-atomic thinkers, the three mentioned above in particular were those who sensed what was coming and in time proposed a "cure" to save mankind from ruin. "All three men proposed the same cure: if anxiety is to be replaced by harmony and hatred by love man must regain his self-respect, he must accept the energies at his disposal and use them maturely for his own welfare and for the welfare of others."

It seems to me that Sorel got mixed up in Mr. Humphrey's mind with Erich Fromm somewhere along the way. His idea of violence is equated with the psychoanalytic concept that healthy release of aggression is a necessary precondition for benevolent and harmonious "object relationships." In actual fact, however, Sorel's concept of violence had nothing to do with such hygienic and prophylactic considerations.

Sorel looked to war, not as a means for man to "abreact" anxiety and become healthy, but as the only thing that will enable future generations to acquire a lofty and heroic spiritual heritage on which they may live. He wanted to regenerate mankind through a grand illusion, disdainful both of the "pleasure principle" and of the "reality principle." Freud, of course, waged a relentless war against this kind of thinking, in which he detected all the clinical signs of neurosis.

THE trouble with Mr. Humphrey's treatment of Sorel is that instead of interpreting him he identifies with him. He attributes to Sorel a kind of outlook now in honor among American intellectuals: a concern with "healthy social adjustment" and "maturity"; a passion for "verifiable factual knowledge." The result is a strangely unhistorical and unperceptive book. Every motif in Sorel's work is treated thoroughly and seriously, but somehow all the accents are misplaced. The man never comes alive for

the ironical reason that all his poses and conceits are taken at face value.

To mention one example among many: the author makes much of Sorel's aloofness and detachment from every cause. He construes Sorel's relationship to syndicalism as that of the historical observer: to Sorel, he says, "syndicalism was a historical phenomenon to be observed in the same light as the patriotism of the Greek city-state, or Christianity, or the ideals of the French Revolution." The true interpretation of this Sorelian analogy is just the reverse: it shows, not that syndicalism to Sorel was merely an antiquarian theme, but that to him the Greek city-state, primitive Christianity, and the French Revolution were living and contemporary things, creative myths that still exercised their magic across the mists of the past. Sorel did break with syndicalism, but not because his attitude towards it was that of the cool and detached observer; it was because it no longer fulfilled the longing of his aching, childish, indignant, noble heart.

The Shock of Enlightenment

BRIDE OF THE SABBATH. By SAMUEL ORNITZ. Rinehart. 410 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ISA KAPP

FOR certain Jewish intellectuals, the crucial aspect of their relation to the East Side ghetto of their childhood was the shock of emancipation from it. And it is not fair to read their later writing without some sense of participation in the world that opened up when the doors of the *cheder* were shut and the restrictions of "Baba" (Ornitz's transliteration) eluded. It must have been a stirring experience to grow up in the warm orbit of the fervent and uncomplicated Marxism of the early part of this century; and it must have been a fillip to self-esteem to feel oneself an active part of the Enlightenment.

But just this quite natural self-esteem causes trouble for a writer like Samuel Ornitz. He apparently cannot recover from his surprise that the commendable *cheder* boy, who once satisfied Rebbe and grandmother, has become an American novelist with a philosophy that encompasses Freud, Shakespeare, and class struggle.

Is it wrong to exercise this constant incredulity about one's own accomplishments by

**VOLUME 3 HAS JUST BEEN
PUBLISHED. A COMPLETE
SET IS NOW AVAILABLE.**

Contents of volume 3:

Jewish Literature in Biblical Times, A. Menes • Hellenistic Jewish Literature, Ralph Marcus • Talmudic and Rabbinical Literature, Boaz Cohen • Liturgical Literature, Boaz Cohen • Hebrew Poetry in the Middle Ages, Joseph Heller • Modern Hebrew Literature, Meyer Waxman • Old-Yiddish Literature, N. B. Minckoff (in collaboration with J. A. Joffe) • Yiddish Literature in the Past Two Hundred Years, Samuel Niger • Jewish Literature in the United States and England, Harold U. Ribalow • Jews and Jewish Problems in German Literature, Hugo Biber • Jewish Literature in Russian, S. Dubnow-Ehrlich • Jewish Art, Rachel Wischnitzer • Jewish Music, A. W. Binder.

INDEX OF ALL THREE VOLUMES

**EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS
OF VOLUMES 1 AND 2**

COMMENTARY:

"This volume is the first serious collective effort of its kind in English. . . . It is not only informative but also stimulative of thought in the highest degree. . . ."

**U. S. QUARTERLY BOOK LIST
OF THE CONGRESS LIBRARY:**

"... The Jewish scholars named in the Editorial Advisory Board and on the Board of Editors provide the highest recommendation for the quality and accuracy of the articles in this 'encyclopedia handbook'."

**JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE,
NEW HAVEN, CONN.:**

"... The articles are most revealing, and no one can read them without learning much about the Jewish people and their place in the world. . . ."

The Jewish People

Past and Present

The work covers all fields, spiritual and material, in the life and history of the Jews. The contributors are outstanding scholars of the United States, Israel and Europe.

These are books of 8½" x 11", each containing 430 two-column pages, with about 150 photos, plates, diagrams, maps and full-color de luxe plates.

Board of Editors:

Raphael Abramovitch, Abraham Kin, Jacob Lestschinsky, Abraham Menes, Samuel Niger, Dr. Aaron Steinberg, Dr. Mark Wischnitzer.

Editorial Advisory Board:

Prof. Salo W. Baron, Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, Prof. Mordecai M. Kaplan, Prof. Jacob R. Marcus, Dr. A. L. Sachar.

3000 years of Jewish history—up to 1939

Anthropology	Statistics	Literature
Religion	Art	Music
Philosophy	Languages	Demography
Morals		

\$30 per set; de luxe edition \$45

\$10 per vol.; de luxe edition \$15

Free booklets upon request

JEWISH ENCYCLOPEDIA HANDBOOKS, INC.

67 Lexington Avenue

New York 10, N. Y.

Tel: ORegon 9-3868

a little forthright exhibitionism? Mr. Ornitz's Saal Kramer not only "doted on his people's customs and folklore and delighted in the wit and poetry of Yiddish, adorned with Hebrew's most brilliant gems," but eventually took in "five Bernard Shaw plays in one season"!

Bride of the Sabbath is a bargain, two books in one: the story of Saal's rise from the confinement of Hester Street orthodoxy to the breadth of Tolstoyan Christianity, and, parenthetically, an education as well in anti-Semitism, assimilationism, pimpism, and a great many other social phenomena. Mr. Ornitz also translates innumerable Yiddish phrases and sometimes does a neat job with an American colloquialism: e.g., "dead pan (expressionless face)."

He sees knowledge as a fruitless but treacherous wilderness that he has had to conquer without the aid of a map. That is why he so welcomes anything in the form of an interpretation, a pattern, that might organize the unruly fragments for others. When he mentions the intergroup name-calling that took place on the East Side, he finds it helpful to remember that the Mexicans in the Southwest were also called "greasers" as they were deprived of their land. A description of Saal as a child with *peyes* and token prayer shawl immediately conjures up the vision of another little fellow identically dressed, "in Whose Name the pogroms would be called." And a Jewish boy's reluctance to initiate a Jewish girl sexually bears involved cultural connotations: "For this would be acting like a Christian who for so long had the right to ravish her, just as a Southerner once could take any Negro girl without fear of the law, because a black's word would not be taken against a white's any more than a Jew's against a Christian's which makes a farce out of *The Merchant of Venice*. . . ." Do you get the whole picture? Mr. Ornitz is clearing the path so that we may reach his point of enlightenment without so much *kop-weh* (woe of the head).

Bur to describe Ornitz cutting a comic figure as popular educator is not the last word. Both his book and his personality bear the stamp of the American ghetto's vigor and resourcefulness, and one can read *Bride of the Sabbath* simply to enjoy the East Side's physical presence. Ornitz remembers precisely the foods on the stands, the odors of hallways, the inventive chatter of the women. The book may even be

worth looking at just for Ornitz's English, which is a rare phenomenon, blending the new scientific jargon and the old ghetto rhythms, full of egregious mistakes, but mellifluent and irrepressible. This language must have been the despair of the Rinehart editors, who have left "disingenuous" for "ingenious," "perpetuate" for "perpetrate," "sociology" for "social work." It is a use of English which has by now almost disappeared from our speech, though it crops up occasionally (and hauntingly) at businessmen's conventions, in political oratory, in the formulations of toastmasters and after-dinner speakers like Harry Hershfield and George Jessel.

The sentimentality of *Bride of the Sabbath* stems from Ornitz's failure to realize that his memory of the East Side exists almost entirely on the sensual level. The intellectual and spiritual *content* of Jewish orthodoxy was determinedly rejected by his generation, but Ornitz seems to have embraced the *atmosphere* of piety with all the greater insistence. Thus Baba is invoked either as a saint or as a bore, but is never discovered as herself; and Saal eventually marries an Irish girl who, by virtue of her small clean physique and unwavering devotion to the Catholic Church, turns out to be nothing more nor less than a Baba-image. Possibly it was so difficult for Saal to see his family, especially its women, with any detachment because he sees only the vainglorious image of himself in their eyes, as they tried to hold on to him and he moved beyond their reach.

It is obvious that Mr. Ornitz's imagination is fixated on that proud moment of liberation. But we may guess from his need to limit himself in his freedom, to circumscribe his learning, to return to the known, what a rude transition he must have been making to the new secular culture. Thus, whenever the question of anti-Semitism is raised, he is quick to remind us that Christ was also a Jew, *ex nostris*—as if any affinity between Jew and Gentile could only issue from membership in the same family. And this insularity, much harder to shed than any orthodox dogma, colors his whole concept of Jewish-Gentile relations, vitiating by bad taste what might otherwise have been an admirably unrestrained belligerence. In this as in so much else, he retains the East Side's dread of alien terrain, its demand that the world be seen always in familiar terms.

The Silent Opposition

THE MEMOIRS OF ERNST VON WEIZSÄCKER. Translated by JOHN ANDREWS. Regnery. 322 pp. \$5.00.

Reviewed by H. R. TREVOR-ROPER

IN 1949 Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker was condemned at Nuremberg to seven years' imprisonment on a charge of war crimes. His sentence was commuted and he was released in October of 1950; he died last August. For five vital years, from 1938 to 1945, he had been the head of Hitler's foreign office, the man who made practical and consistent, or may even have modified, the criminal and aggressive foreign policy of Hitler and Ribbentrop. The verdict of the court was not indeed unanimous. Weizsäcker was known not to be a real Nazi; there was evidence that he had sought at some risk to prevent the war; and a dissenting judge recommended acquittal. His condemnation therefore raised doubts in many liberal minds. What was a German civil servant to do under Nazi masters? To resign, and thereby abandon all hope of preventing disaster? Or stay in office and risk condemnation by the victors?

The dilemma is genuine; and after the judgment against him (and in spite of a somewhat sinister account of his attitude in Ulrich von Hassell's diary), Weizsäcker enjoyed a good reputation among Anglo-Saxons, who have never had to face this dilemma and are chary of too easy answers. As if to consolidate this reputation, he then, like so many Germans, published his memoirs. If this was his purpose, he once again, as so often in his politics, proved a bad calculator. Henceforth—in the English-speaking world at least—the portrait of the virtuous Weizsäcker is irreparably destroyed.

At first sight, observing the jaunty complacency of the author, his small-town snobism, his utter lack of subtlety or introspection, his grotesque triviality, we might well be tempted to dismiss him sympathetically as a diligent but second-rate official of little intellectual capacity, short political vision, and no moral stamina, uncomfortably lodged in a key position and faced with problems beyond his powers. In fact this would be too favorable a view: it omits the evidence, obvious in spite of an ambiguous and evasive style, of real political intentions, which he never disclaimed.

Weizsäcker was a Swabian, with all the self-

satisfaction and servility of the official aristocracy in a petty court. He had an abbreviated education and in his memoirs gives no evidence that he ever contemplated thinking. The only maxim which he mentions as guiding his life is *in dubio abstine*—"when in doubt, keep quiet": a policy of evasion to which he has certainly remained faithful. After twenty years' service as a naval officer he slid, through the office of naval attaché, into regular diplomacy, and there, by his diligent, compliant conduct, reached in eighteen years the top of his profession. Meanwhile, in 1933, Hitler had come to power, and thereafter Weizsäcker had to ask himself that formidable question: what, in such circumstances, does a respectable civil servant do? If we can believe him, he asked himself repeatedly. Unfortunately, never having thought deeply, he was not competent to answer so difficult a question. Therefore he adopted the easy solution: *in dubio abstine*.

In 1933 Weizsäcker decided that Hitler might be a statesman after all, so that it was his duty to stay in office. His reasons proved wrong, but he nevertheless stayed. In 1934 he found that Hitler, being a criminal murderer, could not last, so that Weizsäcker must stay to serve his successor. Hitler did last, but Weizsäcker nevertheless stayed, and, since others went, was promoted. After all, if Hitler was to last, was it not all the more necessary for Weizsäcker to stay, to control him? Hitler proved uncontrollable, but Weizsäcker still stayed. In 1938 Weizsäcker found it his duty to stay in order to prevent war. He did not prevent it, but he still stayed. In 1939 he found it his duty to stay in order to arrange a compromise peace. He did not do so, but he still stayed. He stayed in order "to shake off the dictatorship." He did not shake it off, but he still stayed. He stayed until 1943 when he was transferred to be German ambassador to the Vatican.

So far, all this, though unedifying, is understandable. It is the reaction of thousands of Germans who, being dependent on regular employment, and having families to maintain, doubted but complied, and now, by the plea of human cowardice, and by inventing retrospective but implausible reasons, excuse themselves. If Weizsäcker had been at all contrite about his failure he might similarly—though less properly, for of the educated we demand higher standards—have claimed to be excused. In fact however he was not: indeed, his complacency

is nauseating. By staying he achieved absolutely nothing except to further Hitler's war. Nevertheless his determination to stay is represented by him throughout as a positive virtue.

Why did he stay? Clearly not through any real scruples. A careful examination of this sorry collection of half-told facts and shifty arguments gives proof of that. In fact Weizsäcker had a policy. He was a German nationalist whose general sympathy with Hitler's aims was obscured and modified not by moral scruples, or political principles, or common humanity, but by fear. He was afraid of defeat. If Hitler could gain his objects without war, no one was more willing to help him than Weizsäcker. He approved of the absorption of Czechoslovakia and Poland—provided it was done without risk of defeat in war. Munich he regarded as a triumph; for it was both a victory for Hitler, and bloodless; Chamberlain, whose surrender made it bloodless, was "a great man"; and no praise is high enough for the chief advocate of such surrender, Sir Neville Henderson.

The great crime, in Weizsäcker's eyes, was not to assist Hitler but to "exasperate" him. For all his insistence on the necessity (for oth-

ers) of showing Hitler their strength, when others actually did so (in May 1938) Weizsäcker wrung his hands at this "unfortunate psychological error." His own opposition, so often and so loudly asserted, consists only in retrospectively ascribing to himself phrases of meaningless ambiguity which he can now usefully reinterpret, and in assuring us that when General Beck—a real opponent of Hitler—ignored his timid advice and insisted on resigning, Weizsäcker, as an expression of sympathy, gave him a copy of Plutarch.

In truth, we have had enough of these "good Germans" who stayed in office for the good they could do. What good did they do? Here or there one or two of them may have softened an order, saved a friend: but what is that against the wholesale crimes which by their wholesale timidity they made possible? Hitler could never have ruined Europe without their compliance, and their only possible excuse is a frank confession of asininity—or silence. If standards of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, are ever to return to European politics, this should be recognized. The Weizsäckers should appear before the public in white sheets, not blowing these discreet and furtive trumpets.

BOOK REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

DAVID DAICHES recently returned to England, after some years in this country, to teach at Cambridge University.

WILLIAM POSTER is an editor of the *American Mercury*.

PAUL KECSKEMETI is on the staff of the Rand research corporation.

GEORGE Z. GOLDBERG is the pseudonym of an American who has traveled extensively in the Near East.

PAOLO MILANO is a professor of Italian at Queens College.

H. R. TREVOR-ROPER, Oxford historian, is the author of *The Last Days of Hitler*.

COMMENTARY

is printed by

THE COMET PRESS, INC.

200 Varick Street, New York 14, N. Y.

WAtkins 4-6700



PRINTERS OF FINE BOOKLETS, BOOKS, AND PUBLICATIONS

THE NATIONAL ROOSEVELT DAY DINNER

Sponsored by Americans for Democratic Action

POINT FOUR and THE ROOSEVELT TRADITION

Honorary Chairman: MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Honorary Co-Chairmen: Helen Gahagan Douglas
Bartley C. Crum

Speakers

SEN. HERBERT H. LEHMAN – WALTER REUTHER

Panel of Commentators

ELMER DAVIS, chairman – Martin Agronsky, Eric Sevareid and others (incomplete)

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City

January 25, 1951

Tickets: \$50 per person

No fund-raising

For reservations: phone PLaza 3-3056

ROOSEVELT's Good Neighbor Policy has borne fruit in today's Point Four concept, and ADA has therefore chosen it as the theme of its National Roosevelt Day Dinner.

OTHER cities where Roosevelt Day Dinners have been scheduled during the latter half of January:

Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Des Moines, Detroit, Kansas City, Knoxville, Lincoln, Louisville, New Haven, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Providence, St. Louis, South Bend, Terre Haute, Washington.

SPEAKERS include:

Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan

Senators Paul Douglas, Hubert Humphrey, Brien McMahon; Leon Keyserling, Murray Lincoln, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and other outstanding liberals.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR ROOSEVELT DAY

Co-Chairmen: Sen. Herbert H. Lehman, Robert E. Sherwood

Buy

Maiden Form

*There is a
Maidenform
for every type
of figure!*

CHANGING YOUR ADDRESS?

Help us deliver your COMMENTARY without delay. When advising us of a change of address, please indicate *both* old and new address. At least 4 weeks' notice is required in effecting a change.

THANK YOU.

Address:
Subscription Department
Commentary
34 West 33 Street
New York 1, New York

MANISCHEWITZ chicken soup



best
you
can
buy

Rich, satisfying, full-bodied soup — brimful of golden, chicken goodness . . . and it's ready to serve in a jiffy — ready to bring to your table all the hearty flavor and wholesome nourishment of finest home-made chicken soup.

RICE • KREPLACH • NOODLES

Our most priceless possession

This month, we begin our forty-second year as an oil company. What have the years since 1910 brought to us?

Growth—yes. We started with one horse-drawn tank wagon. Today, we have millions invested to give our customers every benefit petroleum can provide. The years have given us skill and experience, too—a “know how” which has made our Amoco products famous for quality.

But the most important thing we have gained is good will, the high regard of our customers for our company and our Amoco products.

That is why, as we enter our forty-second year of business, our first and firmest resolve is to zealously guard that good will. It is our most precious possession.



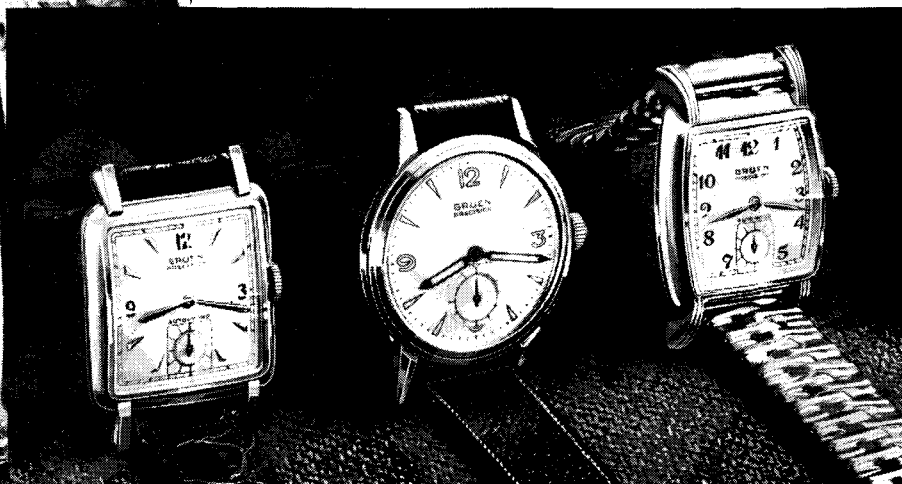
AMERICAN OIL COMPANY

As logical...and modern...as automatic shifting

The amazing watch that winds itself



There are some things you want, because they reflect what you are...a man abreast of events...in tune with the times. The car you drive shows it. The Gruen Autowind Watch on your wrist shows it, too. For the handsome Gruen Autowind is the *modern* watch that winds itself automatically as you wear it...that stores up over 30 hours of dependable reserve power with the normal daily movements of your wrist. Completely self-reliant itself, Gruen Autowind gives you the same feeling. It never demands attention but invariably attracts a lot. Shock-resistant. Anti-magnetic. Available in water-repellent and luminous dial models.



AUTOWIND SOVEREIGN
17 jewels. 14-karat gold. Faceted crystal. Alligator strap. **\$135.00**

AUTOWIND LEADER
17 jewels. Luminous dial. Water resistant. Guildite steel case. **\$55.00**

AUTOWIND MARKSMAN
17 jewels. Distinctive case and dial. Expansion band. **\$71.50**

GRUEN Autowind

THE PRECISION WATCH—AMERICA'S CHOICE SINCE 1874

Tune in Gruen's exciting ABC television show, "BLIND DATE," starring Arlene Francis. Enter Gruen's big prize contest... get free entry blank from your Gruen jeweler.

Every Gruen Watch is electronically tested and certified for **PRECISION** performance only after passing rigorous tests for accuracy and dependability. Official timepiece of TWA—Trans World Airlines. Trade marks Registered U.S. Pat. Off.
© 1950. The Gruen Watch Company, Time Hill, Cincinnati 6, U.S.A. In Canada: Toronto, Ontario. Prices include federal tax and are subject to change without notice.